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A Study

BY
KATHERINE CARMARTHEN Leeds

' . . . Aimer c'est virtuellement savoir ;
Savoir n'est pas virtuellement aimer.'

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PART I

CHAPTER I

‘He spoke of Beauty.’

THE other day I was standing before a certain picture in the private collection of an Italian friend of mine, when a hand was laid on my shoulder, and, turning, I saw that the owner, a man of some seventy winters, was at my side.

‘You are right to study that picture,’ he began. ‘I long to tell the story of it to all high-flown young men who talk to me of their transcendental theories about Soul and Intellect, and their philosophical ideas of love, which are cold and dead as an icicle. Look at this. Does it not speak to you?’

‘It does; but in a voice that, as yet, I scarcely understand. At present, I am chiefly

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struck by its pathos,' I replied. 'Has it then a story? I see that it is called "Beato Amore," I suppose with some allegorical meaning; and the artist is Guido della Varazia. Who was Della Varazia?'

'One of the cleverest artists I ever knew, and well enough known here at one time. This was his masterpiece. *She*,' pointing to the picture, 'was his wife.'

I took another long look at the work before me. There was some attraction in it that affected me strangely; a tragic power seemed to breathe forth from the canvas with a kind of sad and solemn warning.

It was a simple enough theme, without a single touch of the melodramatic in any line. Only a dead woman lying on a couch, as though fallen into a deep and dreamless sleep. The modelling of the lifeless figure, and of the folded white hands, was as perfect as any work of the old masters; and the whole conception was replete with emotion and vigorous yet delicate power. The

colouring—pure white death-robes against a soft, blue-gray background—was striking from its very simplicity, the only bright tint in the whole picture being the red gold of the hair, that waved back, Madonna-wise, from off the perfect forehead, and fell in a long curl across the woman's breast to where her hands lay lightly clasped upon her heart. A Passion-flower was falling from between the fingers that had just relaxed their hold on life and love. The face was exquisitely beautiful, with a haunting and pathetic loveliness. In it there was something more than the mysterious calm and mystery of death—an expression hovering over the closed eyes, round which the drooping lashes cast a shadow of infinite pain, of *life in death*—in no other words can I express it. It was as though, during her last moments on earth, the sufferer had passed through the bitterest heart-anguish and yearning, so that when death came it brought with it a sudden peace and joy that glimmered over the sorrow like

the first sun-ray over a deep and sombre river. It must have been at this moment, when the soul's rejoicing had just flashed upon, and not yet quite triumphed over the heart's agony, that the artist drew his inspiration.

'It appears to me,' I said at length, 'that in spite of her beauty she went through life hungering for love. Yet one would have thought most men would have been ready enough to give it to her. Had she a history?'

'In a sense, yes. If you call that a history which is nothing more nor less than the development of a human heart, without one dramatic or exciting incident in it from beginning to end? She was the wife of my greatest friend, and thus I was witness to many significant little passages in what has always seemed to me a very pathetic life. It is only a memory—a reminiscence; but, such as it is, you are welcome to hear it, if you think it will interest you.'

‘Nothing I should like better,’ I answered, following him to a lounge in the embrasure of the window facing the picture. ‘I know by experience that your reminiscences are worth listening to, and with this face to inspire you, I shall expect something soul-stirring.’

As Conte Fabei said, it was only a memory, a fragment of a life; but, partly perhaps owing to the attraction the picture had for me, my interest was keenly excited by the fortunes of the beautiful Amore. So much so that afterwards I wrote down the story as I had heard it, adding, here and there, one or two connecting links which my friend had either merely hinted at or left to my inner consciousness to divine.

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In his youth Conte Fabei had devoted himself to the study of art. Not that he aspired to any success in the profession of it, but because he was sincerely appreciative of the fine arts generally, and infinitely preferred

the gay freedom of Bohemian society to the conventionalities of fashionable life. Being the possessor of a considerable fortune, he was able to indulge in friendly patronage of any promising artists who took his fancy ; and one of these, a clever and rising young fellow some years younger than himself, became his dearest and most intimate friend.

Not that the two men were exactly kindred spirits ; for, whilst Fabei was somewhat old-fashioned, with orthodox views of love and religion, Guido della Varazia was a curious combination of philosopher, idealist, atheist—influenced entirely by reason and intellect, and contemptuously incredulous of some of Fabei's most sacred beliefs. He was extraordinarily gifted. What cost other men years of study seemed to come naturally to Della Varazia. The laws of perspective, of anatomy, and the secrets of colour, were instincts in him as they were in Raphael-Urbino or Titian. He was so incontestably superior to the ordinary class of artists in

the great art city that it never occurred to any one to envy him. His very talents raised him above common jealousy; and Fabei could always condone eccentricities of character when they could be attributed to the vagaries of genius. Twenty years ago art in Rome was, on the whole, more pure and earnest than at the present day, and Della Varazia was nothing if not earnest. He never painted a 'pot-boiler' in his life, nor for one moment thought what was most likely to seize the fancy of the multitude. It was one of his curious inconsistencies that if he saw an opening for success he was too proud to take advantage of it, as though it would be a degradation to his art to work with the direct aim of winning popular favour. He was determined to raise the public taste to his own high criterion of excellence, instead of lowering his own ideal to suit a less refined one. And the un readiness of the public taste to let itself be raised was a lasting source of contemptuous despair

to him. Most of his friends secretly believed that a little condescension on the part of Guido's genius would give it just the perfecting quality it lacked; but, except Fabei, none dared openly avow this opinion. If one did, he only laid himself open to an argument of which he scarcely understood the drift, whilst Guido remained as unconvinced as ever of the possible fallacy of his own way. It was not only as a painter that Della Varazia aspired to fame. He was well known in literary circles as the author of some exquisite poems, in a very perfect style and language. But they, too, rose above the intelligence of the multitude, and, though admitted to be clever and striking, were generally considered uninteresting, lacking the spontaneous feeling of true poetry.

Much the same objection was made to his pictures. Such grand conceptions, such colouring, such delicate and perfect workmanship, had not been seen in this century.

But people did not care for them. Not that they were charged with definite faults, or criticised with any justly forcible arguments. The failure was inexplicable—an indefinable something that made less really powerful works more popular and sympathetic, and sent one away from Della Varazia's grand subjects with a vague sense of dissatisfaction. To a man with unlimited ambitions, and a determination to win fame, this fact was sufficiently galling, however much he might try to conceal his chagrin under a lofty contempt for the 'voice of the people.'

'What is wrong?' he once asked Fabei, after showing the latter a newly-finished picture which had been intended to eclipse all his former efforts, and to force the world into appreciation of its beauty. 'I see by your face that it falls short of your expectations. I consider it the best thing I have ever done. Perhaps you do not see the meaning in it, the allegory I wish to teach. That is the mistake you all make,' he added

impatiently. 'You look for nothing that is not on the surface; you rave over a pink-cheeked Madonna simpering over a placid Bambino; but any attempt to unite Thought with Painting is incomprehensible to you. What I struggle to represent is a picture poem; but I am a failure. The world would thank me more for a blue and pink orthodoxy that appeals, not to the mind, but to the senses, and that could be taken in thoroughly at one glance by a dull-witted *contadina*. I am not a sign-board painter.'

'Without doubt you are in the right; no one denies your genius,' replied Fabei. 'The question is, what are the limits and restrictions of art?'

'There are none. We aspire after the ideal, and that soars beyond us in limitless space,' cried Guido enthusiastically. 'Shall we ever attain it? Shall I? Surely, if constant striving and unspeakable worship count for anything, some day I shall catch a glimpse of its wings. It has been the

ruling passion of my life, since I was a child—so high—who had not yet grasped the full meaning of the word Beauty—that keynote of the artist nature.'

'The ideal?' repeated Fabei a little sarcastically; 'what is it? where is it? Have you ever tried to express in plain prose what you mean when you talk about the ideal, Guido *mio*? I should be curious to hear it defined. Or is it incomprehensible to one so thick-souled as I?'

Guido took one or two turns up and down the long studio, his head thrown back, and his fine dark eyes seeking inspiration from above. To his friend there was nothing inspiring in the faded colours of the ceiling. But it was always maintained of Guido that to him things terrestrial *were* not; his vision seemed to pierce up and beyond, to a fair region of which more prosaic worldlings knew nothing.

Fabei lounged idly on the divan just vacated by some lovely model, and tried,

ineffectually, as he had done a dozen times before, to analyse the complex individuality of his companion.

What a splendid intellectual face it was, and what a strong resemblance it bore, in some way or other, to Della Varazia's pictures. Not that he had the egotistical vanity of transferring his own features to canvas! It was rather a likeness of expression—in the lack of warmth and feeling which detracted from his personal beauty, just as it did from that of his pictures. His face was grand as an old Greek statue, cold, lofty, refined, with far-seeing eyes that, half unconsciously, half purposely, overlooked the matter-of-fact details of this world, as trammels to the freedom of mind and soul.

Suddenly he paused before Fabei, looking at him with a puzzled expression, and, instead of launching into a pæan of some impossible state of felicity, exclaimed,

'*Ebbene!* What is *your* ideal? Have you one? The real truth, mind.'

‘I suppose we have all got one, though certainly it is a useless encumbrance,’ said Fabei. ‘Well, mine may be summed up in very few words: anything for a quiet life. Come! have patience with me, and don’t jump to the conclusion that I wish to spend my life in eating and drinking and riotous living. That is not peaceful enough for my taste, and might lead to the restlessness of dyspepsia. But, honestly, my idea of happiness is to find a lovely, good, and charming woman, who would love me and let me love her, in a calm and tranquil way. I have no turn for scenes and passions and ecstasies. In fact, I believe my ideal is a strictly domestic one, and it is certainly commonplace. Still, you asked for the truth, and here you have it. Now, in return, give me your views on the subject.’

‘Love—love—love! that is the everlasting cuckoo-cry with you all,’ Guido exclaimed. ‘I tell you it is a delusion. I do not believe in earthly love. It is a Dead Sea apple, a

wild hope born of folly, and slain by prosaic monotony and the irksome sense of bondage. You can't live upon love and kisses ; and the warping cares of motherhood, of household worries and petty details, make any higher intercourse between husband and wife an impossibility. I daresay, since perfection is not to be found on earth, that the married life, when successful, is as happy an existence for some natures as can be had here ; but do not tell me it is an ideal state. You have described what you choose to consider the best earthly lot ; but the ideal is essentially the unattainable—one's highest dream of a heavenly life.'

'Perhaps so ; but if I am content to imagine a heaven resembling an earthly lot, I do not see the harm,' said the other, amused at Guido's earnestness. 'Besides, I consider a mutual happiness, such as I have described, to be so rare as fully to merit the title of ideal—if it is true, as I grant, that the ideal is synonymous with the unattainable. But,

do you mean to say, candidly, that your highest dream dispenses altogether with love for woman?’

‘No, and yes. Yes, if you speak of an earthly, fleshly love; no, if you mean a spiritual union with a kindred intelligence. There, if you like, you have my ideal. A love purified from material dross, infinite in its comprehensiveness; a melting and fusion of two souls, of two spirits that have shaken themselves free from the bondage and desires of the body that they may rise on the wings of perfect intelligence to the highest realms of bliss.’

He stopped abruptly, shook back his hair, as though to fling off the hot enthusiasm that had carried him away, and added, with a laugh, ‘I am a madman. But do not presume to tell me that I shall ever find what I long for in this matter-of-fact sphere.’

‘If you did, would it satisfy you? I do not believe it. In the first place, *amico mio*, you are so led away by your feelings that

you explain yourself badly. Your visions are like your pictures—too high for the common herd. But may one be permitted to ask if your “kindred intelligence” has a face and form? Or is she a thing of air, a spiritual abstraction?’

‘Being an artist, one is bound to have a favourite type of beauty,’ answered Guido. ‘I cannot say if mine would be embodied in the dream-vision I have described to your mocking ears. Probably not. But I will not deny that I sometimes, side by side with the “thing of air,” image to myself a human being with a face of such exceeding loveliness that, though I have tried a hundred times over, I find it absolutely impossible to portray it. It seems to evade me most when I try hardest to grasp the details of its beauty.’

‘Ideal—alas!’ said Fabei, shaking his head in mock despair; ‘you are a hopeless original, Guido. Why can’t you be like the rest of us, and find your type of beauty in

one of our Roman women? They are not to be despised, some of them. When you do meet with yours, you will find out that she is a mermaid with a tail, or some other inhuman appendage.

‘For once you are wrong!’ exclaimed Guido triumphantly. ‘I have actually seen my beauty. My vision was suggested by a girl’s face that flashed across my path a year or so ago, when I was passing through a little village near Lerici. It had come and gone before I realised what I had found; and it has haunted me ever since, though no doubt I have idealised it a good deal. What I saw was a girl of fifteen or sixteen—a mere child; whereas the face of my fancy is that of a woman. I must go back there some day and look for the original. But I dread seeing that my lovely child has developed into a buxom female with a double chin; or, worse still, into a fashionable beauty, with high heels and a crinoline. It is all on the cards.’

‘My advice is—*go*,’ said Fabei, as he rose to leave him. ‘Perhaps the fair unknown may teach you to be more human in your ambitions. The difference between our ideals is this: yours is love born of the intellect; mine, love born of heart. We shall see, in the future, which of us comes nearest the attainment of them.’

For the next two or three years Della Varazia was not very productive in any line. His talents seemed to be lying fallow, perhaps storing up fresh energy and power to be put into some great work that would show, at its real intrinsic merit, the genius that, hitherto, had always stopped just short of achievement. But Fabei distrusted this idleness. It struck him as having its root in something deeper than the reaction that so often follows long sustained endeavour. It was more like the sudden yielding to a disappointment and self-confessed failure that Della Varazia was too proud and

sensitive to acknowledge. He became more of the metaphysical thinker, and less of the human being—if it may be so expressed—every day. As a companion there was no one more delightfully suggestive and interesting, and he was always more or less of a hero in the eyes of younger artists. But his utter want of sympathy with the little joys and follies and frailties that go to make up the sum of most of our lives, made him singularly *friendless* for one who was gifted by nature with everything to render him attractive to his fellow-creatures.

Gradually Fabei, like others, gave up expecting to see him crowned with the wreath of fame. His conceptions, of which he would sometimes speak with renewed enthusiasm, were nobler than ever; but he made not the slightest effort to fulfil them. Evidently he had come to the humiliating conclusion that his genius lacked the first essential elements of life, whilst he was unable to fathom where the secret lay.

The more he sought for it, the more it eluded him. The more he absorbed himself in a strenuous intellectual consciousness, the less capable he became of seeing that what kept his work, his life, even his character, so cold and null, was the absence of that very virility of feeling and emotion which it was his chief aim to smother, as a hindrance to the higher and fuller development of reason.

One day, about three years after the above - quoted conversation, Della Varazia rushed with unwonted eagerness into Fabei's room, whilst the latter was in the middle of that comfortable noonday meal, so dear to Southerners.

‘Congratulate me, Lorenzo!’ he exclaimed; ‘I have found her!’

‘Found her? Who? Where?’ asked Fabei lazily. ‘Is she your last inspiration?’

‘My first—my only one. My ideal of beauty, for whom I have been looking these

last four years. You remember, I told you about her. The girl of whom I caught a passing glimpse near Lerici, ages ago. *Ebbene!* I have been hovering round there several times since, and now I have found her; and, what is more, have made acquaintance with her, and am off to-morrow to stay with her parents, who wish me to paint her portrait.'

He paused for breath, took a few mouthfuls of Chianti, then, putting down his glass, turned to Fabei with some impatience.

'My dear fellow, how lethargic you are. Don't you understand what an era this makes in my art life? Wait until I have painted a picture with her for my model. *Then* the world will not turn aside from it.'

'I do congratulate you; but you cannot expect me to work myself into a fever because you have found a beautiful peasant-girl. You artists are always picking up these uneducated treasures.'

'But that is the beauty of it,' interrupted

Guido, bringing down his hand on the table with such vehemence that Fabei trembled for his new Venetian glass vases. 'She is a lady—a *lady*, most scoffing Lorenzo—with a purity of soul and nobility of mind in her face that never yet were seen in any peasant-girl that ever was born. Even her name is fanciful, and suited to her face—Amore da Costa.—What do you think of that for a beautiful woman? Amore . . . it was a rash thing to give such a name to a bundle of red flesh that might have developed into a very Gorgon of ugliness.'

'Well! come into the *loggia* and tell me about it,' said Fabei, half inclined to jeer. 'I will try and listen to your romance as seriously as possible. For when Guido della Varazia announces that he has found his ideal woman, the occasion calls for solemnity.'

It appeared that Della Varazia had been spending the last three weeks at his favourite

retreat in the neighbourhood of Lerici, where he could always make sure of perfect solitude and quiet when he wished to let his mind soar, utterly freed from all sordid and mundane considerations. He did not profess to be there with the avowed object of seeking the beautiful girl he had once seen with such delight; but he did cling to a faint hope that he might some day meet her, and even frequented the village churches, on Saints' Days, on the chance of finding her at her devotions. The matter did not much trouble his thoughts, and he was beginning to reconcile himself to the conviction that, instead of being a native of the place, she had been merely passing through it as a stranger, when the following incident took place.

One afternoon at the hour of Vespers, when Guido was on the hillside, finishing some slight sketch he was making of the sunny bay lying between the verdant hills, his solitude was broken by a woman's voice

calling, now coaxingly, now impatiently, as though seeking a spoilt and mischievous child—

‘Amore! Amore! Amore! Where have you got to, troublesome one? Do you not hear me? Amore! Amore!’

Perhaps there is no fairer spot in all Italy than Z-ia, especially when one has climbed half-way up one of the hills, so that one can look far over the bay, with its radiant blue waters and brown rocks; whilst, above and below, cluster luxurious growths of olive and chestnut trees, and the fresh greenness of young vines. On that particular evening there was a glowing Arcadian loveliness about the scene—a tremulous sweetness in the air that seemed to add a poetic significance to the harmonious name that was echoing through the groves, and that made Guido wonder, with cynical incredulity, if the owner of it were worthy of the title her parents had chosen for her.

‘Amore! Amore! Amore! My child, where are you? Amore!’

The voice was a pleasant one, with a certain refined intonation which proved that it did not belong to one of the native *contadini*. Guido began to imagine some fairy legend of a lovely woman who haunted the hills and valleys in vain search after ideal love, calling all through the summer days, ‘Amore! Amore! Amore!’

But the nearer approach of the voice, and its growing impatience, dispelled his reverie, and a minute or two later he found himself face to face with a tall, fair-haired woman of middle age, whose heightened colour and evident exhaustion did not rob her of a queenly and matronly beauty. When she saw Guido she hesitated; then, apparently satisfied that he was a gentleman, addressed him in the half-patronising manner most people assume towards vagrant and unknown artists.

‘Pardon, Signore, have you seen a young

lady pass this way? She had on a white dress, and carried a basket of flowers.'

'No one has been this way, Signora,' answered Guido politely. 'But, now that I think of it, I believe a figure in white passed along the pathway yonder, that leads to the Chapel of Our Lady. It was perhaps half an hour ago.'

'Thank you, Signore. Forgive me for troubling you,' she added graciously; 'but I have been looking for my daughter all over the hillside, and am almost exhausted. That must be my excuse for addressing a stranger.'

'If I can be of any service, pray command me,' said Guido, who had observed the resigned dejection of her face when he pointed out the steep uphill path. 'Can I not follow the Signorina to the chapel and tell her that you are here, waiting for her?'

The lady glanced critically, first at Guido, then at his sketch. Probably she caught

sight of his name, which, during an idle moment, he had carelessly scrawled on his easel; and, though he had failed to obtain the success after which he aspired, most people in Italy, who took the smallest interest in contemporary art and literature, were more or less familiar with the signature of Della Varazia. At all events, her manner increased in friendliness, and she even, after many apologies, accepted his offer.

It did not take Guido long to hurry up the path leading to the chapel, a humble enough little building, but of great age, and standing in a most picturesque situation. Some peasants were coming away after Vespers, chattering and singing, their gay clothes giving a dash of life and colour to the scene. One or two laughed and nodded a greeting to Guido as he went up the steps; but when he let the heavy leathern screen swing to behind him, he found himself alone, except for a few women who were telling their beads before the high altar.

‘No white-robed Amore here,’ he thought. ‘Probably she is not so devout as her fond mother imagines, and when I do find her I shall get a rebuff for my pains. But, if she is at all like her mother, she must be pretty enough to be worth some trouble. She may be in one of the chapels doing a little penance, or hurrying over an Ave Maria.’

There was no one in the first two chapels. But as he approached that especially dedicated to the Virgin, Guido suddenly paused with a low exclamation of delight, that escaped him unawares, ‘I have found her!’ he cried, under his breath. ‘My ideal!’

A girl was kneeling before the little shrine, whose tawdry gilding and gaudy mosaic were mellowed into a certain dim splendour now that the evening shadows were beginning to creep into the church. Her attitude was one of rapt devotion, the large blue-gray eyes raised to a picture of

the Madonna that hung over the altar, and the slender white hands clasped with a childlike simplicity on her breast. Her features were very delicate and perfect, though of a somewhat peculiar type, and, in spite of their purity of outline, differing essentially from the cold, unintellectual character of Greek beauty. She more resembled the ideals of some well-known modern artists, if one can imagine their sad and world-worn creations endowed with the warm glow of youth and innocence. The high forehead, from which deep auburn hair waved back in ripples of red 'gold, and the fathomless dreamy eyes, were the eyes and forehead of a thinker who had pondered over the mysteries of the Infinite; nor were the passionate, curved lips—so pure and red—those of a child who had lived but some twenty years of a summer life. But the smile that parted them, as she whispered her little prayer to the Virgin Mother of Love, was indeed that of a child—most

sweet, most glad, most innocent. And it seemed to Guido della Varazia, when he saw it, that here, at last, he had found that perfect loveliness for which he had so long been seeking.

CHAPTER II

‘My lady only loves the heart of love.’—ROSSETTI.

AMORE DA COSTA was the only child of the Cavaliere da Costa, one of the many impoverished noblemen of Italy. He came of an ancient family that had bequeathed to him all the empty parade of name and rank, without the more substantial advantages necessary to preserve their former dignity and splendour. The greater part of his life had been spent travelling; and during one of his visits to London he married a beautiful Englishwoman, a good deal younger than himself.

For some years they were childless, a common grief to them both; and when, at last, a little girl was born, to be the comfort

of their declining years, they baptized her, in a moment of fanciful sentiment, by the quaint name of Amore.

Signora da Costa's own childhood and girlhood had been a sad one. Her parents had never forgiven her for not being a son and heir, and she could not forget the harsh neglect with which they had treated her, nor the rebellious aching of her little heart, when she saw the affection that was lavished on other children. 'When I have a little girl of my own,' she used to say to herself, 'her life shall be all love.' Nor did she abandon this childish resolution when she grew older; and when she really had a baby of her own, she called it Amore, that its very name might be a perpetual reminder to her of the devotion it ought to receive from its mother.

Not that Signora da Costa or her husband needed any such reminder, for the child Amore was more in danger of being 'killed by kindness,' than by the reverse.

Fortunately, hers was one of those gentle natures that will not be spoilt. She seemed to thrive in her atmosphere of love like a delicate lily in sunshine. A touch of harshness would have made her shrink like the sensitive plant, and draw into herself the sweetness of her eager and warmly-loving heart.

Perhaps the mistake in the girl's bringing up was this: that she was not sufficiently braced and strengthened to withstand the rough winds of experience that must inevitably, sooner or later, ruffle the serenity of even the most tenderly guarded life. All the sharp edges were taken off existence for her. She was literally cradled and nursed in love, taught to believe that the one thing needful for happiness is to love and to be loved: a doctrine that is not without its value. But even this fundamental truth, as much as if not more than all other truths, must be taken, with certain qualifications, in its widest and fullest sense:

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and the gospel of love, as Amore learnt it, was not so much that divinest and all-embracing love of humanity in the gross, as the narrower concentration of a passionate heart upon those few favoured individuals who alone, out of all the world, have power to rouse the deepest emotions of our being; the love that will exhaust its energies for *one*, sacrifice itself for *one*; but that, from its very nature, draws us apart from our fellow-creatures in a deep and absorbing exclusiveness.

It is little wonder if, as she grew from maidenhood into womanhood, Amore's childish conception of love, as the primal element in her happy home life, enlarged its horizon and stirred her imagination into innocent dreams and fantasies which found ample nourishment in the stories and poems her mother delighted in reading to her. Signora da Costa was so truly good and conscientious a mother that it seems invidious to reproach her with her one weakness,—a

curious old-fashioned sentimentality that, amongst other things, made her cling to the illusion that love and marriage are necessarily yoked together. At any rate she was determined that they should be so in the case of her daughter. The foreign system of *mariages de convenance* was repugnant to her; and long before Amore was in her teens the Signora had persuaded her husband that wealth and title were of inferior importance to the happiness of their child.

Of course, if Silvano, Conte da Costa, the young head of the family, grew up as excellent a man as his father had been, and if he and Amore should chance to take a fancy to each other, so much the better. But nothing should be done to force their inclinations.

Silvano da Costa was an orphan, scarcely more than a month or two older than Amore; and as children they had been the most devoted little couple during the two years

that Silvano had spent in the household of his uncle. Since then the cousins had not met. But every year the Cavaliere and his wife passed a few weeks with young Da Costa, either at his palace in Rome or at his villa among the Abruzzi. And it must be confessed that if they had an ambition in the world, it was to see the young people fall in love with each other. It was from no spirit of worldliness. But was not Silvano handsome, sweet-tempered, and with a nice and fastidious sense of honour, the very ideal of what Signora da Costa wished her son-in-law to be? He was just the husband for Amore, warm-hearted and chivalrous, and ready enough, on his part, to fall in love with the sweet little cousin who had played with him as a child, and whose miniature at the age of eighteen seemed to him the loveliest thing ever painted by human hands. 'You must keep her for me and let no one else even look at her,' he used to say, half jokingly, half

seriously. 'You are the only mother-in-law I will put up with.'

Thus somehow it came to be an understood thing that when he was twenty-one he should be allowed to come to the Villa da Costa at Z-ia to renew his acquaintance with the cousin for whom he already felt such a romantic and boyish admiration.

Nor was Amore quite ignorant of this secret hope of her parents. How often, in summer, when the exquisite beauty of the Italian evenings seemed to admit of no theme but love, did Signora da Costa pour into the girl's not unwilling ears stories of Silvano's goodness, Silvano's loneliness, Silvano's longing to see again the little friend of his boyhood.

Amore was ready enough to listen. Did not her happiest recollections date back to days when, with a freedom rarely granted to her, she had roamed the woods with Silvano, scrambled up the banks of the rivers that dashed down the ravines

from their mountain sources, or joined, as best she could, in his boyish games, coming home with stained and tattered frocks, and gloveless brown hands that were the despair of her devoted old nurse? It is scarcely strange that, after a time, the nameless hero of her day-dreams was always called Silvano, or that she felt a delicious flutter of shy anticipation when she was told that some day he was coming to the Villa da Costa on purpose to see her.

What should the visit mean, but one thing?—that ideal rapture of first love which she had been taught by her mother to look forward to as the invariable happy consummation of girlhood?

The day on which Della Varazia first met face to face with his long-sought ideal was an all-important day to Amore da Costa.

Was it not her twenty-first birthday, and had she not for some time known instinctively, without being told in so many words, that this year was to make a difference

in her life, to open out to her vistas of new experience and new joys? It was to be to her something more than what the age of eighteen brings to other girls, that 'coming out' which is always anticipated with a wondering eagerness so disproportionate to the added happiness it really brings.

She was to be a child no longer; but a woman, ready to take a woman's part in the world, to make some one life brighter and better by her woman's love.

That May afternoon when she and her mother were sitting in the long cool *loggia*, which was softly darkened by green *persiennes* to shade it from the dazzling heat and glare outside, she was quite prepared for what Signora da Costa had to say to her.

They had been silent for some time, each thinking her own thoughts.

The Signora had a book open on her lap, but her eyes kept wandering to the white-robed figure that leant back in careless grace

against the high carved chair, the beautiful head thrown back, and the deep, dark eyes gazing up abstractedly at the cherubs and loves that were holding high revel amongst the flower-garlands of the painted ceiling.

For the first time, Signora da Costa was forcibly struck by what would always have been the chief thing that a stranger, first seeing Amore, would notice—the curious depth and pathos of her expression, combined with a child's radiancy of innocence.

None knew better than her mother that Amore's life had been one of perfect love and gladness, unmingled with the smallest knowledge of sin or sorrow, and that the dreamy air of pathetic thoughtfulness was one of appearance only, in no way emblematic of mental sadness.

But now it suddenly flashed across her that if Amore's lot were to be an unhappy one, it would go hard with her. In the clinging gentleness of her affections lay a great capacity for suffering—a latent depth of

intensity and emotion that would make trouble fall on her more heavily than on a less passionate nature.

If only Fate would decree that she and Silvano should marry each other! Then, at least, she would be spared the cruellest of griefs, and be sure of a faithful and protecting love and care.

The thought emboldened Signora da Costa to speak.

‘Amore,’ she began, ‘did you know that we expect a visitor to-day?’

‘A visitor?’ said Amore quickly; ‘no; you did not tell me. Who is it? We so seldom have visitors here.’

‘It is your cousin Silvano. We think the time has come for his long-promised visit.’

‘I shall be glad to see him again,’ said the girl, a conscious flush spreading over her cheeks. ‘We shall hardly know each other.’

‘I think he knows you already, from my descriptions,’ answered her mother. ‘He is very fond of hearing about you.’

‘I shall be very glad to see him,’ repeated Amore softly.

There was a short silence. Then she came to her mother, and, kneeling on the floor, laid her head on her shoulder with a little sigh of contentment, and a whispered

‘*Mother.*’

There was a world of confidence in that one word. It made Signora da Costa’s task an easy one, and rendered preparation needless.

‘I think you understand what this visit may mean?’ she said, laying a caressing hand on the auburn head. ‘Remember, I only say what it *may* mean, for we will never bind you to anything against your will, *carina*. But I cannot doubt Silvano. He has only to see you, to know you, my sweet one, for his dream to be realised. But, unless you wish it, the visit need mean nothing to you. You know I have always told you that love is the mainspring of happiness. It is not likely then that I

should raise a finger to lose for you what I believe to be the sweetest thing in life.'

'I have you—and my father,' said Amore, drawing closer to her; 'what more could I want?'

'A lover, my child,' whispered her mother; 'a lover in your husband.'

'And you, mother? What would you do without me?'

'Ah, we will not talk of that! We must think of you, Amore. You are twenty-one to-day. Most girls are married before that; but we were selfish—we could not spare you. But now you are old enough to see something of the world. And if—if nothing happens to prevent it, we must take you to Rome next winter, and see how you like gaieties and excitement. Does the idea smile to you?'

She received no answer; and looking down, she saw that the girl was in some radiant reverie that had brought a most joyful smile to her ripe red lips.

A few moments later she sprang up.

‘I am going out for a little while, mother,’ she said. ‘You do not want me at present?’

‘No, child. But keep in the shade. The sun is still scorching. It is only fit for lizards to be out in such a glare.’

‘Lizards and Englishmen, as they say. But it is wrong. English people do not care to be warm,’ said Amore gaily, as she left her; ‘and in my love of heat I am all Italian, you know, mother. *We* do not faint in the warm weather. We leave that to the poor English, who are so used to their wet, gray clouds that a gleam of sun frightens them out of their wits.’

Half an hour later Signora da Costa saw her pass through the garden with a basket of flowers on her arm.

It was characteristic of Amore that she did not spend the hours before Silvano’s arrival thinking of herself and of the impression she would make upon him, nor in adorning herself, that her beauty

might be more striking to his first glance. The trivial vanities and insignificant details so dear to other girls were foreign to her. There was an innate seriousness in her nature that gave something of a religious sacredness to any event that touched her deepest feelings. Her first instinct, after her conversation with Signora da Costa, was to be alone for a little while, to think over the change that was perhaps coming into her life.

It seemed to her that already, on this one day, she had passed over the boundary between girlhood and womanhood, and was standing ready to see life's fuller mysteries open before her eager eyes, serenely confident that behind the shimmering veil that hid the future, lay nothing that was not, if possible, even more golden than the peaceful joys of her childhood. Some dim sense of the responsibilities and struggling efforts of the wider life was born in her; some dim comprehension that she would need the aid

of a loftier and more immaculate power than her own to brace her for the heights and depths of experience.

For that there would be depths as well as heights she was fully conscious. She even, in her youthful confidence, looked forward to them as to what would add interest and action to her life. And there could be no depth so dark, so profound, that love would not be able to illumine it with a light that would never set.

Love! That was to be the saving grace through all trouble, all terror, all pain; so that the trouble would lose its bitterness, and the terror its agony, and the pain be no longer unbearable.

So she hoped—so she believed.

When she had filled her basket with snow-white Annunciation lilies, she turned her steps towards the hill at the back of the Villa da Costa. A long *pergola*, or flower-covered bower, led out of the garden, and as Amore passed under its festooned arcades

she paused a moment, looking up at the purple Passion-flowers that drooped their tender blossoms over her head. Then, stretching up her hand with a sudden, quick thought, she gathered one of the flowers and laid it, warm and passionate, amongst the delicate purity of her lilies.

After that she wound her way slowly along the narrow uphill path; now through orange groves, now amongst the silver-gray olive-trees, whose leaves seemed to shimmer and tremble under the fierce sun. Often she stopped to rest, or to look at the lovely and familiar scenery; and by the time she reached her destination—the little church of Santa Maria—the afternoon was over, and the sun was low in the heavens.

A service was going on when Amore entered the church and took her place at one of the rough little cane chairs that were scattered about the nave. From a group of peasants came the monotonous drone of the Ave Maria; several of them turned to look

curiously at the Signorina who knelt among them, and made signs to attract the attention of their neighbours, without a break in their heedless prayer, as they let the beads of the Rosary slip, one by one, between their brown fingers.

When service was over and the Vesper hymn had been sung, the picturesque throng of worshippers dispersed into the open air, with clatter of wooden shoes and gay outburst of talk and laughter. The lighted tapers on the altar were extinguished, and the church was left to peace and quiet.

Amore moved to a little chapel on her right, and, kneeling at the altar-rail, gave herself up to prayer, as she could not have done when the peasants, with their wandering glances and inattention, were around her. But now she was free to pour out her hopes, her glad wonder, her thankfulness, to Madonna Mary the Mother of Love, she who, from her Beatitude in Heaven, looked down with ineffable sympathy, and tenderest

pity on the maidens and mothers who laid before her their little human joys and sorrows and heart-secrets. She alone could understand the sacred innocence of the girl's thoughts, the pure passionateness of a heart that was as white and sinless as the very lilies, amongst whose waxen petals she had, with such unconscious symbolism, laid her purple-hued Passion-flowers.

When the girl had ended her prayer and made her little flower-offering, she felt a sudden consciousness that she was being watched; and, slowly turning, she met the eyes of a stranger fixed upon her with an intensity of admiration that brought the ready colour hurrying to her cheeks.

Was the answer to her prayer for guidance so quickly vouchsafed?

Meeting him here, like this, whilst the devotional fervour was still upon her, could she fail to believe that this was a sign that the Madonna sanctioned her love-dream, and

had sent Silvano, himself, to plead the cause of love?

So it was that, when she saw Guido della Varazia, she turned to him with the sudden, flashing smile of a girl who welcomes her lover, so full of gladness was it.

CHAPTER III

'Even so, when first I saw you, seemed it, love,
That among souls allied to mine was yet
One nearer kindred than life hinted at.'

ROSSETTI.

WHEN Amore da Costa greeted Guido della Varazia with that sweet and confiding smile, he was nearer being carried away by a thrill of exquisite delight than he had been since his enthusiastic boyhood. For a moment the fantastic idea passed through his brain that each was to the other the long-sought affinity that exists, somewhere or other in the world, for every human being; that perhaps, just as he recognised in her his ideal of beauty, if not also something better and higher, so, too, she felt instinctively that a subtle magnetism drew them together in a spiritual

communion apart from the rest of the world.

But the thought was only momentary. He had his message to deliver ; and at the sound of his voice the mystic charm that was over them changed into reality, passing away for ever into one of those radiant, almost ecstatic memories that never return a second time into a man's life.

'Your pardon, Signorina,' he began ; 'I have been asked to tell you from the Signora, your mother, that she is waiting for you on the hillside. She was tired with walking, and as I had seen you pass this way, I begged to be allowed to deliver her message to you.'

Whilst he spoke, a shade of perplexity crossed the girl's brow.

'Signorina !' How strange of her cousin to address her like that. The formality checked the glad welcome that was on her lips ; and she answered, rather embarrassed, 'Ah, my poor mother ! How inconsiderate I am ! It

was good of you to take the trouble to fetch me . . . Signore.'

'May I escort you back to her?' ventured Guido, as he held aside for her the heavy screen at the church door. 'Or is it an impertinence to ask?'

She glanced up at him with an amused smile hovering about her lips, and hesitated, as though not quite sure what to make of him. Then answered, with a low, soft laugh that was not without a hidden and gentle mockery, 'Why, yes, I should think so, *Signore*.'

She puzzled Guido. Was she laughing at him for some reason of which he was ignorant; or was it her custom to address with this friendly, scarce-concealed raillery any stranger who chose to accost her?

But another glance at the girl walking by his side made him ashamed of the implied blame in the last conjecture, as soon as it had entered his head.

There was nothing of over-freedom in her

manner; it was rather the quiet confidence of an innate simplicity that knew no evil.

Yet she did not look a child. Even her movements, in their slow and languid grace, were not exactly those of a girl; and her gestures, when she turned her head, or when she lifted her heavy-lidded eyes, had the quiet dignity of a woman who had outgrown the quick impulsiveness of youth.

Their path lay through an orange grove, the terraces of sweet-smelling orange-blossom above and below them forming a fairy-like bridal bower, under which Amore, a white-robed spirit of love, passed like the loveliest bride in the world.

Guido felt that he must make her look at him again with her fathomless eyes.

‘Your country is a very beautiful one,’ he said, stopping before a rift in the trees, between whose soft white framework they caught an exquisite glimpse of the Carrara mountains, where a faint reflection of the sunset still lingered. ‘I am a Roman, but

when I want a draught of pure, natural beauty I always come to the Levantine Riviera. Look at that vision! One would say that the Carraras were not mountains of solid, rough marble, but of glittering topaz.'

Amore looked up quickly, her brows drawn together, and a startled wonder in her face.

'Yes, yes,' she answered, her voice rather hard and cold; 'but let us hurry on. My mother will be anxious. It was very thoughtless of me to stay out so late.'

She hurried down the path, and did not speak again until she had reached the spot where Signora da Costa was waiting for her.

She could not understand it. Was this a stranger? Not Silvano after all? It must be so. For one thing, had she paused to reason about it, she must have seen that this was a man between thirty and forty, not a boy of her own age. And, again, Silvano's hair and eyes were darker, and, unless he

had greatly altered since she knew him, his expression could not have so utterly lost the typical vivacity of the Italian temperament, in exchange for the self-controlled austerity of the philosopher.

She was longing to be alone with her mother, to question her about this mysterious stranger. Evidently he was an artist; there were his easel and half-finished sketch, and his palette and colours lying on the grass where he had left them.

She was so lost in conjectures that she did not hear her mother speaking to her, until after the Signora had twice addressed her. Then she found that the stranger was being introduced to her as Signor Guido della Varazia, a name which, though it sounded vaguely familiar, did not convey anything to her mind, until she heard Signora da Costa saying something about her pleasure in making acquaintance with one who had already given her so much delight by his charming poems.

‘They have been great favourites of ours, have they not, Amore?’ she said.

Amore smiled and nodded her acquiescence, but said nothing. She remembered Signora da Costa lamenting over the abstruseness of Della Varazia’s later poems, declaring that they were quite beyond her comprehension. ‘Very finely - expressed metaphysics,’ the Cavaliere had agreed; ‘but not poetry pure and simple.’

However, Guido chose to imagine a sympathy in Amore’s smile that expressed her silent appreciation of his gifts; and though he was too well used to the criticism of the general world to set much value on its opinion, or to regret its incapacity for following his mental flights, he could not help a sense of satisfaction in thinking that this girl grasped and understood his meaning.

But even if his poetry soared above the pretty and sentimental commonplaces dear to her heart, that did not prevent

Signora da Costa from feeling a respectful admiration for and hero-worship of a well-known poet and artist; and she wound up her expressions of gratitude for his kindness by an invitation to accompany them home to dinner to meet the Cavaliere, who would be delighted to make his acquaintance.

‘This naughty child of mine has made us very late,’ she concluded as they walked leisurely down the hill. ‘But it is the privilege of children to keep their parents waiting, and her father does not know how to scold her. Besides, we had fortunately postponed the dinner-hour this evening. We expected a friend from Rome. But I have just had a letter saying that he is forced to put off his visit for a few days. He has had a touch of Roman fever, poor boy. So I hope, Signore, you will take his vacant place at our table?’

Guido bowed his acceptance with a little cynical amusement at the situation; he did not usually make friends so rapidly with

gushing ladies who admired, but were secretly bored and puzzled by his works; and already, as he listened to the Signora's amiable little commonplaces, he was beginning to regret the wearisome evening that was to come.

Amore followed a few paces behind her mother and Guido. If she had felt a pang of disappointment on hearing of Silvano's non-arrival, it was not so much because his visit was deferred as because her strange little enthusiasm of expectant love had been thrown away on a stranger, instead of being a gift to Silvano, of whom she had thought and hoped such wonderful things. She had felt so sure that, in some mysterious manner, love himself had come to her, after her prayer to the Madonna; and when she remembered how she had smiled in eager welcome, her cheeks burned with shame and confusion.

'I wish it had been Silvano,' she said

again and again to herself. 'It *ought* to have been Silvano. He can never come at quite such a right moment. It seemed as if even our Lady in Heaven was blessing my dream. And then, after all, there was nothing; only a stranger. A stranger who must have wondered at my familiarity. Oh, it *ought* to have been Silvano.'

That evening spent with the Da Costas was not so wearisome as Della Varazia had expected, and showed him a phase of existence which had not often seemed worth speculating upon in his calculations of the scheme of things.

It was that calm, serenely-happy family-life which Lorenzo Fabei had once quoted as his ideal, and which Guido had scoffed at as void of beauty and interest. The domestic relations had but small attraction for him; and though, when younger, he had pictured to himself the refinement and sacred charm of home-life and home-ties, he had

always shrunk from testing the reality, lest the disillusion should prove too sharp and overwhelming to be borne.

By degrees, as he grew older, marriage conveyed to his mind mere monotony and insipidity, and his exclusive habits, which seldom led him into the private homes of his friends, prevented him from learning by experience that on rare occasions Fabei's dream becomes a reality, invested with a singular beauty that is intensified by the sanctity of a self-renunciation that has had no place in the dream.

But his perception of the delightful sympathy, and deep, if undemonstrative, affection that seemed to underlie the cheerful serenity of the Da Costa family, brought with it a sense of healthy felicity that made the world of abstractions, in which he himself lived, very remote and fragile in its indistinctness.

He was reminded of those pictures, left us by certain classical writers, of the chaste

beauty and orderliness of some of the ancient Greek households. Here was the same atmosphere of dignity and refinement, a sweet privacy which no one from the outside world might violate, very refreshing to the jaded senses of a man thoroughly impregnated with the irritating complexities of modern thought.

The courtesy and intelligence of the Cavaliere (a fine gentleman of the old school), the matronly graciousness of his wife, the love and respect given them by their daughter, all contributed to the harmony of the picture; and the whole tone of the place, from the unostentatious luxury and comfort of the rooms, with their judicious mingling of English homeliness with Italian art, to the interesting beauty of Amore, awoke a responsive chord in Della Varazia's fastidious nature.

The Signora da Costa was goodness and amiability itself; but Guido quickly gauged that there was little more in her character than what was on the surface. He preferred

the quiet humour and shrewdness of the Cavaliere, who was a clever man in his way,—well-read, and with a clear, practical insight into things which was in strong contrast with his wife's essentially feminine view of life.

It pleased Guido to assume that Amore had inherited her father's intellect, with her mother's loveliness; though even then he was unable to account for the profound, and, as it were, spiritual intellectuality that, if he was any judge of physiognomy, was her chief characteristic.

After dinner, when they were all sitting on the terrace, in a silver-world of moonlight, he made several attempts to draw her out of her shell of silent reserve. But it seemed to be an effort to her to join the conversation of her elders; she sat quietly by her mother's side, her dreamy eyes fixed now on her father's face, now on that of Guido, as if by watching the play of their countenances she could see farther into the meaning of their words.

As a matter of fact she did not always even try to follow the conversation when it left the field of her girlish understanding. But never before had she heard any one talk so eloquently as Guido talked on art or literature, or who could lend to the little commonplaces of ordinary conversation such vivid colouring,—passing on from the most trivial subject to something deeper and larger, that moved and interested her even if she could not always keep pace with the swift intuitiveness of his intellect.

He was a poet, an artist. That alone was enough to stir the imagination of a girl who had met no one, hitherto, outside her small home-circle; and besides, in spite of their short acquaintance, there was already the delightful Freemasonry of sympathy between them. *A sudden thought strikes me; let us swear an eternal friendship.*

Having once got hold of a lion of such magnitude as Guido della Varazia, it was

not likely that Signora da Costa would refrain from making the most of him. She plied him with questions on every conceivable subject, trying to enlist his praise on behalf of the sentimental rhymesters and poetasters dear to her heart, begging him to explain his own poems, and to tell her if he called himself romanticist, humanist, idealist, realist, or any other 'ist,' until poor Guido's patience would have been taxed to its utmost, if it had not been that he had an object in regard to the daughter, which was only attainable through the good graces of the mother.

'I call myself neither realist nor idealist,' he said at last, half annoyed at the Signora's enthusiastic persistency, half pleased to be able to air his opinions for the benefit of the girl whose eyes spoke such unfeigned sympathy. 'I don't choose to be tied down to the rules and limitations of any school. I profess to be nothing but a lover of the beautiful.'

‘Nevertheless, I repeat that you are an idealist. Please do not disappoint me,’ answered the Signora. ‘Modern realism, as exemplified in the French school, has no place in your art, Signore.’

‘Ah, *si* ! If you take it in that sense I certainly repudiate having anything to do with it. It is the realism of all that is low and ugly. It disgusts me mentally and physically. I prefer to shut my eyes to such things.’

‘*Anzi*. If you can !’ put in the Cavaliere quietly.

‘Well, we all can if we like. Most of us don’t like. The serpent in us makes us prefer to grovel.’

‘And the coward in us makes us turn away our eyes. It is a case in which extremes meet,’ said the Cavaliere, with a half smile on his lips.

He was leaning against the marble balustrade, apparently watching the fitful sparks of his cigar gleaming like glow-worms, but, in fact, very much awake to the attrac-

tion a certain white-robed figure at his side seemed to exercise over the artist.

‘You are wrong—wrong!’ cried Guido. ‘I appeal to you, Signora—to you, Signorina.’

‘Yes, yes, Federigo,’ said Signora da Costa soothingly, half afraid of a quarrel. ‘It must surely be best to look at what is high, and so keep one’s thoughts high?’

And Amore added rather shyly, but not so low that Guido’s listening ears could not overhear the words—

‘Love, which moves the Sun and all the Stars.’

‘*Per Bacco!* I will not stir from this seat until I have got leave to paint her picture,’ Guido inwardly vowed.

She was sitting near to her father, leaning her head against the white marble that shone silver in the moonlight. Close to her, a bush of oleanders, heavy with fragrance, traced its delicate pale pink petals against the deep, transparent blueness of the wide moonlit sky. Down below them, there

were gleams of white shingle circling the silver sea. It was a dream-world of deep yet lustrous blue, and mellow silver lights relieved by that one burst of fair rose-coloured oleanders.

‘Well, we will not discuss morals now. It is a profitless discussion at any time,’ said the Cavaliere. ‘If Signor della Varazia means that what is low and ugly has no place in art, I yield him the argument. But isn’t this realism for you? A June night like this, with nightingales for sentimental women, a moonlight scene for the artists, and a good cigar for the prosaic, like your servant. What more could we get out of your idealism?’

‘Nothing,’ assented Guido. ‘Some things are in themselves ideal; them we *cannot* realise in art. What we can realise is the lower order of things; hence realism has come to be a term for what is base, or rather the *obtrusiveness* in art of a low and ugly element which one is able to overlook

in actual fact, but cannot avoid seeing when it is put before us in a book or picture. As long as idealism means the idea of good, of the true, of the beautiful, it must be higher—on the whole more pleasurable—than a realism which, at best, means only the truth of fact, the beauty visible, and leaves out the good altogether as a superfluity, since it does not exist as a permanent fact in reality.'

'*Si, si!* All I mean is that realistic landscape art gives us more of the ideal charm of nature than an invented scene, though the latter may be choked with thought, and every separate detail as accurate as you like.'

'It depends on what you want to express. Change Leonardo's background in "Our Lady of the Rocks" for real sea and rock, and you lose the spiritual, mystical element. Realism is only, more or less, a clever imitation. *Thought*—that is what we must have in the highest art.'

'Thought? Nonsense!' exclaimed the Cavaliere. 'See here, Signore. Will you

make a trial? You paint me a picture of my child here,—just as she is, mind,—with no thought added beyond what you see in her face. Then we will see how the ideal stands against the real. Will you do it?’

‘*Per Dio!* Yes!’ cried Guido, hardly able to conceal his satisfaction at having obtained the one thing he had been leading up to the whole evening. ‘I give you my word that I will work my best for you, if the Signorina will allow me.’

It was quite against his rule to paint portraits; but this was an exceptional case, and when, at last, the pleasant evening came to an end, he left his new friends with the promise to come back to Z-ia in a week’s time, as soon as he had finished certain business which called him next day to Rome.

After he had said good-night, Signora da Costa came to Amore, and lingered for a few moments by her side, looking at the calm serious face.

‘I am very sorry about Silvano,’ she

said presently; 'were you too much disappointed, Amore? But I hope he will still come in a fortnight or so. The attack was not very serious, he says.'

'Poor Silvano. How tiresome for him,' said Amore indifferently; adding in her dreamy way, 'He is very clever. I am glad to think he is coming back again.'

CHAPTER IV

‘Her voice was as the voice of his own soul
Heard in the calm of thought.’—SHELLEY.

DURING his hasty visit to Rome, Della Varazia's renewed interest and enthusiasm had not time to evaporate, and when he returned to Z-ia to begin the portrait of Amore, he set to work with an energy to which he had for a long time been a stranger.

He was full of conviction that now was the time for him to make that supreme effort for which, during many years, he had been training and raising his faculties. He had never lost the power or the delight of originating lofty and mystical conceptions; where he failed was in the achievement, and even in the mere endeavour to achieve. A

consciousness of having always fallen very far short of his ideal destroyed all the buoyancy of confidence and courageous vigour, without which work of the highest order is impossible ; and his self-centred life of strenuous intellectual development had gradually engendered in him a morbid dissatisfaction with the inevitable failure of all human endeavour,—a shrinking reluctance to test his own powers until he felt himself fitted for that certain success which, with all men, remains for ever far off in a problematical future.

Thus, whilst he pierced deeper and deeper into the mysteries of speculative thought, becoming more and more the philosopher or metaphysician, he lost much of the poetry of warm, human emotion which was the one thing needful to the perfecting of his art. As with so many others who have failed to redeem the promise of their early manhood, it seemed that the wings of his genius just lacked power to soar up into

the clearest atmosphere of truth; and in straining to brace them by the simple force of mental concentration he misunderstood the vital issues; what they wanted was the softening and vivifying unction of love. His soul lay, like a sleeping Endymion, on some cold, clear, mountain height, afar from the throbbing humanity of the lower world. Was it waiting there until some 'chaste Dian's kiss' should awaken it to life and love?

We know Guido's theory of love. Like all his theories it was as impracticable and visionary as it was pure and refined,—too refined for strength, too ideal for endurance. Fortunately he was so well aware of this idiosyncrasy of his that he was not likely to marry under the impulse of a passing attraction. He knew that the intimacy of married life would be accompanied by too many prosaic illusions to make it worth the price; and he often laughingly declared that he could imagine no greater misfortune for a woman than that of being his wife.

It need scarcely be added that in finding his ideal of beauty—that is, intellectual and spiritual beauty—in Amore da Costa, he never for an instant looked upon her from any other than an æsthetic point of view. He was deeply struck and charmed ; more so than he had ever been before by any other woman ; and, possibly, as time went on, he contemplated forming with her one of those ideal friendships of which he had so often dreamed.

With Guido there could be no unpremeditated *falling into love*. All love worthy the name, as he understood it, was the deliberate choice of soul and intellect, not an unreasoning impulse of the affections.

After this spiritual communion he craved with his whole nature ; and perhaps his growing certitude that it never can be realised on earth was more than half the reason of his increasing inaction and self-effacement.

Luckily, the discovery of what he

considered a perfect type of beauty gave a spur to his decaying energies. As the portrait of Amore da Costa grew under his skilful touch, once more his mind was filled with imaginings of beautiful pictures, in which her face would tell to the world, in language richer than words, the high dreams of his soul, and guide the multitude from their worship of merely sensuous objects to an appreciation of the elevating loveliness of intellectual beauty.

Often Amore would turn away her face, with a troubled blush, under the piercing ardour of his gaze. It seemed as if he wished every line of her features, every swiftly-passing expression that flitted across her face, to be imprinted on his memory for ever; as though he tried to fathom her heart, that he might read there what was not already written in her eyes.

It was not often that he was alone with her. Signora da Costa or the Cavaliere was generally present at the sittings, so that

Amore was relegated to her customary position as listener to whatever conversation took place, without joining in it otherwise than as her glowing eyes spoke for her.

Thus it was always through the medium of her expressive looks and ways that Guido chose to imagine he was fathoming her mind and character, believing that the deep and dreamy seriousness, peculiar to her cast of countenance, was indeed her very soul's expression.

He soon began to feel quite a sense of possession, as if he had an exclusive right to the friendship of the Da Costas; and it was almost with a feeling of annoyance that he heard of the expected visit of Silvano da Costa.

'My cousin Silvano is coming to-day,' said Amore one afternoon, breaking one of those long silences that often fell between them when they were alone together. 'Do you know him? I believe he is very gay. If so, how dull he will find us here.'

‘No. I do not know him,’ answered Guido, who was busily working at his picture, with occasional glances at his model sitting there patiently under a great oleander shrub. ‘I have not much acquaintance with fashionable young fellows like your cousin. We don’t care for each other. But this cousin—this Silvano—he is a very charming boy?’

‘So they say.’

‘You are glad he is coming? Perhaps you find it dull here, too, Signorina.’

‘Not dull. But—well, to tell you the truth, Signore, I want some one to share my ignorance. It is humiliating to sit like a statue, understanding nothing, when you and my father talk about one interesting thing after another. I don’t feel as if Silvano would be very clever.’

‘Do we bore you with all our jargon?’

‘No, no, I like it,’ she said eagerly. ‘But it makes me discontented. It shows me, more and more, how stupid I am.’

‘You are not stupid, Signorina,’ said Guido kindly, pausing for an instant in his work to take in the wistfulness that had fallen like a shadow over her beautiful face ; ‘you are only shy and diffident.’

She shook her head.

‘It is not that. I cannot join in your talk because it is beyond me,—so far beyond that it would be impossible for me to reach it. I have always been slow and stupid. But it is only lately that I have felt how much I miss—how much there is to know.’

‘You are young. You will learn. You have the advantage of knowing that the best part of your life is before you, to make what you like of it. With us the best is over,—wasted, a dead loss of energies flung after vain chimeras. We have bought what petty knowledge we possess with our best hopes and aspirations. It is the way of the world.’

‘*You* have not,’ she said quickly,—‘you have not flung away your energies! You have worked, and won success. You love

knowledge, and that, too, you have won. It seems to me that you are to be envied.'

'It may seem so to others ; but they are mistaken,' answered Guido, setting to work again. 'A man can himself be the only reliable judge of his own success. It depends on his ambitions. Other people only see where he strikes—not where he has aimed. What truth is sadder than this, that no one of high aspirations has ever reached his ideal? No one else can help to bring it to him. It is what constitutes the profound loneliness of life.'

'Ah! that I cannot understand,' said Amore, with an intonation of pity in her voice. 'You know, my mother says that without love life would not be worth living; she has never let me know what loneliness means.'

'Love?' repeated Guido scornfully. 'That is the saddest of the chimeras. If we had never dreamed of an unattainable love, we never should have felt the utter loneliness

of existence, and the futility of all earthly striving.'

'Not unattainable ;' and the girl raised to him her dreamy eyes full of soft and tender light. 'It comes once in a lifetime to us all. It is not a dream, but life in its fullest perfection.'

'No, no. Believe me, Signorina, you are making the mistake we all make!' cried Guido impetuously. 'The dream - love, *if* realised, would indeed be the perfect life. But it will not and cannot come. I thought like you when I was your age. But it did not come to me ; and I am not sure that I regret it. The reality might have turned out to be a very gross and material affair, which would have effectually warped one's higher nature.'

Amore shook her head with a little air of wisdom, and smiled incredulously.

'Oh, but I am not going to believe that. I have read your poems, remember. You could not have written some that I could mention, unless you had felt them.'

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Guido laughed. He was beginning to have a shrewd suspicion that the poems she referred to were ones he considered not worth a *lira*. He was too much accustomed to hearing women quote them as his best work!

‘Do you think poets never write of anything they have not felt?’ he asked. ‘I am afraid they do. When one feels any emotion very acutely, it is impossible to analyse it, and one has, therefore, no business to write about it. Did you believe that, to be eloquent, a man must write with his heart’s blood, as the novelists say? Not he, Signorina. All the greatest work, in art or literature, has come from the inspiration of a clear-sighted intellect, not, as poetasters try to persuade us, from confused and transient emotions of the heart. Ah! *Felice sera*, Cavaliere!’ he added, as the Cavaliere entered the room, where he was fond of coming for a half-hour’s chat with the artist. ‘You find us at the beginning

of a discussion. Signorina Amore likes to think that all the famous productions of art have cost their authors pangs to which those of Prometheus on Etna were mere child's play.'

'Instead of being the result of cold bandages, and plenty of black coffee. Is that what you have told her?' answered the Cavaliere, coming up behind Guido, and looking over his shoulder at the half-finished picture.

'Not quite. But great intellectual power is calm and serene, not bubbling over with hot desires of the blood. Why, to take a notable instance, Signorina, look at your English Shakespeare. There is plenty of real and vivid passion in his plays; but he is not swept away by it. He does not convey to us the idea that he, himself, had felt any overwhelming emotions—that he lived what he wrote. That is the marvellous thing. It is the same with Dante. He viewed mankind from a superior standpoint, beyond its

influence, whence he embraced the whole moral scheme of the world in one glance; and then he invested it with his own sublime spirit, touching every phase of life with the magic wand of genius.'

'Is that genius?' questioned Amore, with a shade of dissent in her voice. 'You make it seem very cold, Signore. And I thought Dante—— But yes, yes; I suppose it must be so.'

She felt that there was something in Guido's theory unsympathetic to her pre-conceived notions of the inspired motive-power of art. She did not wish to believe him, and glanced up at her father with an unconscious appeal in her eyes.

The Cavaliere was looking at the artist with puzzled scrutiny. The man's curious inconsistencies baffled him. He could not satisfy himself whether Guido really believed all the doctrines he formulated, or whether he purposely tried to conceal the fiery ardour of a poetic tempera-

ment from the eyes of an inquisitive world.

He smiled, half amused, at Amore's reluctant acceptance of what, to her young enthusiasm, seemed a very chilling definition of the poet's 'divine afflatus.' Nothing could have been in more direct opposition to Signora da Costa's romantic teaching.

'Amore thinks you make genius too much of an icicle. She believes that it is something of the nature of a scorching volcano. Is it not so, *carina*?' said the Cavaliere, nodding reassuringly to the girl. 'I know nothing about poets—not I, by the body of Bacchus. I leave all that to women and girls. But I have my theories, such as they are. I will concede to you that there is one form of genius that smells of the fire; it fills us with regrets and longing; its cry is that there is nothing but misery under the sun. I daresay it is all very fine in its way. But I say it is a cowardly way. The highest genius rises above this. Not, I believe,

with all due deference to you, Signore, because it does not *feel*, but because it has a clearer vision, a livelier faith, and a courage strong enough to live down and conquer, not run away from, the fierce emotions that swamp a feebler nature.'

Della Varazia had left his easel, and was pacing slowly up and down the room, as he often did during discussions that interested him. His keen eyes kept flashing from Amore to the Cavaliere, from the Cavaliere to Amore, full of a questioning that could not easily be expressed in words.

'Perhaps I do not understand—perhaps it is what is wanting in me,' he said musingly. 'Perhaps it is the secret of my failure. What can I say? How reconcile the doctrine of an entirely earthly struggle and victory with the beautiful Platonic idea of freeing the soul from the body, and letting the disembodied intellect gaze, untrammelled by fleshly desires, upon absolute truth and beauty? Would not the mere fact of fight-

ing against what is coarse and sordid, lower the capacity for unalloyed thought and pure ideality? Earthly passion is essentially lowering and weakening. We must rise superior to it, or else fall beneath its black and fire-scorched wings.'

He had paused before Amore, and was addressing himself to her.

An influence, stronger than herself, swayed her in tacit obedience to his will, forcing her to return his gaze with one long look of mute, but infinite, comprehension. The very magnetism of his glance seemed to draw from the fathomless depths of her eyes a responsive flash of subtle and mystic thought, straight from the unutterable visions of an unexplored and guileless soul.

It filled Guido with sudden exaltation.

She understood him. The same yearnings and aspirations that had shaped his life lay dormant within her, awaiting the master-hand that should touch them into consciousness. Here, if anywhere, was the

Amor Intellectualis which would be the completion of his being; the kindred spirit that would help him onward to stand face to face with that absolute beauty of which he had just spoken to her.

But in a moment the electric chain of sympathy had snapped, and the girl rose to her feet, slowly stretching her arms above her head.

‘I am tired,’ she said, crossing over to the Cavaliere. ‘If you will excuse me, Signore, I will not sit to you any more to-day. I am afraid I make a very bad model. It would be different if it was winter. But in June! It is a sin to stay indoors in such weather.’

‘You will never finish her picture until we have a few rainy days,’ said the Cavaliere indulgently. ‘But what would you have? The child thinks that because she was born at the time of birds and flowers, she has a right to live amongst them from morning till night; and her mother indulges her in all her follies. Shall we be weak too, Signore?’

The heat is overpowering indoors. There must be a storm coming.'

'I am ready,' assented Guido, flinging down his brush; 'work is a delusion in this weather; the very lizards are wiser than we. I am prepared to follow the Signorina from here to the Carraras, if she wills it.'

'Listen,' said Amore, as voices were heard talking and laughing in the *loggia*; 'it must be Silvano. I recognise his laugh. He was the merriest boy in the world; wasn't he, father?'

'And the noisiest. His animal spirits are unquenchable, his intellect distinctly undeveloped. I wonder what you will think of him, Signore?' said the Cavaliere, who expected some secret amusement to be got out of two such very opposite characters as Della Varazia and Silvano.

'I am not afraid,' answered Guido, who to tell the truth, pictured the unintellectual youth with 'animal spirits' to be a most unprepossessing boor who tried to make up

for lack of wit and manners by noise and buffoonery.

But the next minute the owner of these objectionable spirits was in the room, and making those very spirits felt in a way that disarmed Guido's prejudices the moment he spoke to him and shook hands with him. He was not noisy, but sparkling with gaiety and good spirits, handsome as Italian men can be, and as natural and unaffected as a boy of eighteen. Signora da Costa, who had brought him into the room, had drawn back, to let him meet his cousin undisturbed. This was a moment that made her maternal heart flutter with such pride and delight that tears began to brim over in her kind, sentimental eyes. What mother does not live over again in the love affairs of her daughters?

As for Silvano, for a second his volubility was checked as he met again the little friend of his youth, grown into such a vision of beautiful womanhood. He had been prepared to kiss her, as he used to do, with

cousinly familiarity ; but now something held him back. The colour rushed into his dark face as he bent his head and looked down on the hand she held out to him.

But no blush came into Amore's face, not a sign of shy trepidation into her eyes. She was as calm and cool as a lily, smiling with a kind of indulgent superiority on her boy admirer. He had come too late to find the key to her blushes ; another hand had stolen it.

CHAPTER V

‘I have played with her as a child.’—TENNYSON.

‘WHO is this fellow who seems to have bewitched you all?’ asked Silvano suddenly. ‘This grave-eyed Apollo whose mouth giveth forth nothing but wisdom?’

The cousins, thanks to frantic manœuvres on the part of Signora da Costa, were alone together, climbing up the hill through massy-foliaged chestnut woods, where the air—what little there was of it—was sleepy and sultry as in a hot-house, and the very flies hung motionless in the vaporous heat.

‘You mean Signor della Varazia?’ answered Amore decorously and still rather shy. ‘He is the artist, you know. He is painting my portrait.’

‘He is, is he?’ retorted Silvano quickly.
‘A thousand maledictions on him.’

Amore tossed off her large hat and fanned herself lazily as she walked.

‘Why should not I have my picture done as well as any one else?’ she asked.

‘I don’t know. Except that I object to a stranger like that having the impudence to sit staring at you by the hour together,’ said Silvano, thinking what a lovely colour were the curls that waved off her forehead. ‘How can you stand it, Amore?’

Amore blushed, murmured that she had never thought of it in that light, and hinted delicately that since her father did not mind, it was not Silvano’s business to find fault.

He was on the point of answering that it did matter very much to him, but another look at her checked him. There was something cold and stately about her that embarrassed him; he could not tell that it arose simply from intense shyness.

‘It is very hot here,’ he said. ‘Let’s

climb to the top of the hill, and see if we can get any fresh air. There are such a lot of things I want to talk about. It is six years since I was last here.'

'Yes. You are not a bit altered, Silvano.'

'*You* are. To tell the truth I am rather afraid of you.'

'Of me? Why?'

'In old days you were,—well, you were younger,' said Silvano lamely. 'What a devil of a path. Let me help you? Doesn't it hurt your feet?'

'I like it. I have not had a good scramble for ages and ages—not since you were here before.'

The rough path, with its round stones smooth and slippery after the dry weather, stiffened and narrowed as it coiled round the crest of the hill. There was barely room for them to walk abreast. Far below lay terraced fields and plantations, gold and green; whilst the motionless gray sea lay

asleep under the hot iron-gray sky. Every now and then a puff of sulphurous wind passed over it, blackening it for a moment with long low ripples. A jagged and tawny cloud hung over the white peak of a distant snow mountain.

‘There will be a storm. We ought to turn back,’ said Silvano reluctantly. ‘Vexation.’

‘You may,’ answered Amore, her spirits rising. ‘But I mean to reach the top, storm or no storm.’

The chestnut trees had given place to pines, tall and straight. The rising breeze was beginning to wake in their restful, dark branches that brushed black against the gathering saffron clouds. A long sighing roll of thunder came climbing over the hills, and passed away in broken moans over the faintly-stirring sea.

‘Isn’t it splendid to watch a storm coming?’ exclaimed Amore, as they paused on the bare sunburnt plateau, where the

stone-pines, standing erect and sweet, made a cool and dreamy twilight. 'We are just in time. Here is the rain.'

First a gentle fluttering of drops overhead, like the beating of birds' wings, then the quickly gathering rush of wind and rain changing rapidly, as it flew over the hills and valleys, into hurling storm-gusts, and slanting white hail.

'*Diavolo!*' cried Silvano. 'What a fool I was to let you come. You will be drenched. Let us get lower down as quickly as we can. It will be more sheltered anyhow. And where there are trees everywhere, one place is as safe as another.'

A crashing thunder-clap drowned his words, whilst a great sword-flash cutting open the sky lit up the valleys and seething sea and jagged coast-line.

'Are you frightened, Amore?'

'Madonna! No.'

She laughed as she ran on in front of him, stopping every now and then to look at the

lightning, and lifting up her face to feel the cool rain showering upon it.

‘I like it. It makes one grow. What a gust! It almost blew me off my feet.’

‘You will be soaked, Amore. See! Let me put this round you.’

He had flung off his coat, and, in spite of her remonstrance and fears that he would catch his death of cold, he insisted on wrapping it round her shoulders. She laughed, but let him have his way, since he declared he would leave it on the ground till it rotted away if she was too proud to wear it.

‘How slippery the wet path is. You will fall and break your ankle, and then we should be in a nice mess,’ he said, as they hurried on down the steep hill. ‘Let me help you.’

‘No; a thousand thanks, but I am not a cripple yet.’

But as she spoke she slipped, and would have fallen but for his timely aid; and having

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once got her hand on his strong, protective arm, he kept it there.

‘You are very proud,’ he said audaciously; ‘but I am not afraid of you now.’

The narrow path allowed them barely room to go abreast. The wind blew Amore’s hair in her face, and made her stagger now and then, so that Silvano’s hand tightened its grasp and drew her a little nearer to him. They both felt so young and happy that they laughed at nothing, and seemed to think rain and storm almost pleasanter and more exhilarating than sunshine. Amore’s calm stateliness had been blown away too; it was such a treat to her to be with some one who was young and merry, and who expected nothing of her except that she should be young and merry also.

Signora da Costa and Guido, who had taken shelter in the *loggia*, heard their bright voices and laughter as they came through the garden,—not hurrying very much in spite of

the rain,—Silvano in his shirt sleeves, dripping wet, and Amore, with untidy hair, limp wet skirts, and her cousin's dark jacket slung round her neck by the sleeves.

When she saw her mother and Guido, she drew herself up with a kind of start, let the coat fall to the ground, and put up her hands to smooth her bright hair. All her usual shy stateliness had come over her again in a moment.

‘You foolish children!’ exclaimed Signora da Costa, her beaming face belying her words. ‘It is just like you, Silvano, to lead Amore off to some mischief the moment you get here. You are as bad as ever. Where have you been?’

‘Up the hill to see the view,’ said Silvano. ‘How can I help it if your country is so ill-regulated as to give way to such sudden storms?’

‘The idea of dragging the child up there. Signor della Varazia, are not you surprised at her. You would not believe it, but the

moment she gets her cousin to help her, she wanders all over the country like a gipsy.'

'I wish the Signorina would let me be her companion sometimes,' answered Guido. 'There is nothing I should like better. Will you, Signorina?'

'Ah, *sì*. If you care for it,' said the girl, lifting her eyes to his face with a quick look of delight. 'I can show you all the loveliest views for miles round.'

Silvano, who had been watching her with the unaffected admiration of first love, raised his brows at this, and, for the next five minutes, subjected the unconscious Guido to a stare of growing anger and jealousy. From that moment he guessed that it was a race between him and the artist, and that the odds were dead against him.

Guido could not help wondering, with cynical amusement, what his friend Fabei would have said to this sudden transformation of the recluse,—the quiet student who could

with difficulty be drawn into the most select circles in Rome, and who avoided woman-kind with a half shy sense of uneasiness in their frivolous presence—could he have seen him on terms of the most genial friendliness with a family who could boast of no artistic nor intellectual abilities, and of whom two members out of the three were women!

It surprised Guido himself when he thought over it. Sometimes, when he was alone in his lodgings in the village, communing with the mighty thoughts of ages, or dreaming his own Utopias, there was a reposeful feeling of relief in having this retreat to fall back upon; a curious sense that this, in its silence, its solitariness, its intensity of meditation, was his real life, and the other but a light and picturesque episode in the more serious development of his moral experience. But he could not quite resist the idyllic grace of what was to him quite a new view of domestic life, as illustrated by the Da Costas; the unassuming mutual

affection, the harmonious simplicity that seemed to divide them, as by a sacred barrier, from the tumult of the outer world. The Arcadian loveliness of their Ligurian home, the intoxicating glow of the golden Italian June, and last, but not least, the suggestive beauty of Amore,—all combined to delight and satisfy Della Varazia's sense of the fitness of things.

Often, after the fierce mid-day heat had abated, he would wander with Amore on the hillside under the luxuriant growths of chestnut and walnut, where wild roses and myrtle were twining their fragrant blossoms amongst aloes and pink-tipped cactus; and where, tread as carefully as they would, at every footfall they crushed out the delicate life of starry flowerets that were born but to breathe out the sweetness of their little lives through the glory of one long summer day.

Sometimes, leaving the woods, they would follow the flower-fringed margin of streams that flowed, now through asphodel

meadows, now through picturesque hamlets, where gaily-dressed *contadini* might be seen washing their linen in the shallows; or, climbing higher up the valleys to the mountains, they would look down upon narrow gorges, down which the water tumbled in foamy tumult over wild boulders of rock, and where dark pine-trees, growing along the steep banks, cast solemn shadows athwart the deep and whirling pools.

Sometimes, as they loitered in the garden during the mild evenings, whilst all around was ablaze with the fairy-lamps of fireflies, they would pause, heedless of the lapse of time, to listen to the inspired love-song of the nightingales that poured out their passionate *Rispetti* in the moonlight, whilst thoughts, too deep for words, kept them silent with that golden silence which is but

‘spoken thought upon the depth of the unspoken.’

Looking back in after days Guido remembered that Amore had not spoken

very much herself. It was he who talked; whilst she listened, drinking in his words with a kind of fascination. He told her of his hopes, his dreams, his unfulfilled ambitions; of his long and indefatigable search after ideal beauty, and of the passionate despair that was gradually creeping over him and decaying his best energies.

It was the tragic revelation of a soul that had defeated its own ends by the very ardour and rapacity of its search after abstract beauty. Just as, by making happiness the ultimate aim and object of existence, true happiness eludes its most eager followers, so, to those who expend their energies in a vain endeavour to make visible and tangible those exquisite dreams that flash like radiant phantoms through the most sacred chambers of the soul, the ideal more and more denies even the rare and evanescent *reflection* of its divine loveliness, which is the utmost that can ever be revealed to our imperfect human vision.

It is a trite maxim, as old as the world, that if you strip the rose of its corolla, to dissect its anatomy, its scent and beauty are fled. But there is a certain kind of character that has almost a mania for tearing the petals from the rare enchantments of life, in ridiculous expectation of learning the secret construction of pleasurable sensation. Della Varazia would take an emotion and dissect and analyse it until nothing was left of it but the bare skeleton, bereft of the emotion; and no skeleton is a pleasant object to look upon. Instead of passively accepting this natural consequence of undue curiosity, Guido considered it a dawning proof of the vanity and folly of emotion in itself; and made it his aim to kill the emotional element in his own character, with the mistaken belief that, when once he had crushed and mortified all sensuous delight in physical objects, he would receive, as consolation, the pure emotion that can only be felt in contemplation of unseen, moral beauty.

He was throwing away life and happiness after the wildest day-dream that ever stole away man's energy and common sense ; the day-dream of a Keats, a Shelley, an Amiel.

It was not thus that Amore, in her inexperience and ignorance of life, read his confidences. To her they were simply the eloquent expression of a heart that longed, like her own, for an all-sufficing love that would be, so she believed, a magic panacea for the nameless dreams and desires that spring eternal in the human breast. It was for this that her eyes expressed such plenitude of sympathy, not for Guido's cold and lifeless theorisings ; his very explanations of them were as Greek to her uncultured mind.

Sometimes, after she had been most frank and charming, she would shrink into herself with what was almost like a vague and childish fear of him. Perhaps it was, unconsciously, a feeble resistance against the net that, by no effort of his own, Guido had

thrown over her, and of which she could not yet be sure if the links were of silk or metal. Whichever they were she had no wish to break them. Her fate had indeed come to her the day that Guido had found her praying in the little chapel of the Madonna on the hill, and the first act in the girl's life-story was drawing to a close.

Happy as the little party at the Villa da Costa had been, Silvano's coming brought with it quite a fresh and exhilarating breath of life and movement. He was thoroughly Italian, at once lively and indolent, sweet-tempered and hot-blooded, with a fund of joyous youthfulness in his face that seemed to carry sunshine wherever he went.

Signora da Costa felt her hopes more than realised when she saw the cousins together; and though she noticed that Amore showed an unaccountable lack of interest in Silvano's arrival, she was too confident of the success of her long-cherished scheme to think that the artist, good-looking

and clever though he was, could have anything to do with the change. Amore said Silvano was charming—just what she had expected—and that she felt at ease with him at once. But she said it with cousinly frankness, without any of the shy consciousness of a girl speaking of her lover; and if Signora da Costa had had a little more insight into character, her suspicions would have been aroused.

Silvano was not so dense. For the first few days he tried to take possession of Amore, persuading himself that the artist, whom he considered to belong to quite a different species from ordinary human beings, could be looked upon as a possible rival; and though Amore was shy and reserved, he thought that only natural under the circumstances, and was perfectly contented so long as she let him look at her and be near her.

He had come there prepared to fall in love. Such expectations are generally

disappointed, but in this case it was not so. The love that had existed first in his imagination became a reality before he had known Amore for thirty-six hours. He was only a boy, but a nice boy, and he knew that what he wanted in his wife was not beauty only, but something else as well, that is rare amongst beautiful women.

Amore had both the beauty and the goodness. It did not take him long to discover that; nor, after he had discovered it, to make up his mind that no one but his cousin should become the Contessa da Costa.

As yet, Fortune had always beamed upon him; and he began his courtship with a sanguine impetuosity that must have carried all before it, if he had only come a little sooner. But now, nothing he said or did could make the girl's heart beat one degree faster, or bring the quick colour to her cheeks, as a word or glance from Guido could do.

The truth flashed upon Silvano one day when he was with Amore in the garden. She had been silent and absent, her thoughts evidently far away, until suddenly she caught sight of Della Varazia coming towards them down the oleander-bordered walk. Then a change swept over her face that spoke volumes to the keen eyes of her boy-lover, shattering his hopes so completely that he could scarcely control himself enough to greet Della Varazia with ordinary civility.

A few minutes later he stood before Signora da Costa with flashing eyes and heaving breast, all the fierce fire of his Southern nature burning in his angry young face.

‘You said you would keep her for me,’ he burst out. ‘And you have not. She has been stolen from me.’

‘Silvano, dear boy! What is the matter?’ exclaimed the Signora, looking up startled from the letter she was writing. ‘Who

has stolen her? What can you mean? Are you speaking of Amore?’

‘*Diavolo!* Yes. I am. I repeat that you have broken your promise. She is lost to me. And for that fellow — that cold-blooded ice-image. A thousand maledictions upon him! It is a scandal — an outrage not to be borne.’

‘Gently, Silvano! You are beside yourself,’ answered the Signora soothingly, but with alarm written in her face. ‘If what you say is true, you know I shall be as grieved as yourself. But it is not true. He has treated her as a child. She is only a child.’

‘No; I am not mistaken. I could not be mistaken in that,’ he said despondently. ‘What am I to do? I love her, you see. Love her, already, to desperation.’

‘What can I say to console you?’ cried the poor Signora, who felt suddenly cast adrift from her daughter and helpless to control affairs. ‘He is so good, this Della

Varazia. I could trust her to him. But it was to you, my poor Silvano, that I wanted to give her. Perhaps it is not yet too late. She may have only a passing fancy for him.'

'Too late? *Diavolo!* It is never too late!' cried Silvano raising his head defiantly. 'I shall fight him yet, to the bitter end.'

And fight he did; if it be possible to fight an enemy who is supremely unconscious of your antagonism, and who invariably treats you with charming friendliness. Della Varazia, like the rest of the world, could not help liking Silvano. Even his petulant humours and occasional fits of rudeness added to his attractive naïveté; whilst Guido remained blindly ignorant of their cause.

He saw that Silvano thought himself in love with his cousin, and it did pass through his mind that it would be a pity

for Amore to throw herself away on a boy who, with all his merits, was mentally incapable of understanding, much less of cultivating her latent intellectuality. But it never entered his head that the young fellow looked on him as a rival!

CHAPTER VI

‘My soul this hour has drawn your soul
A little nearer yet.’—ROSSETTI.

THE end came with an abruptness that surprised every one, except, perhaps, Amore and Silvano; but no one more than Della Varazia himself.

The portrait was finished. It was a clever and striking likeness; the Cavaliere and his wife could not praise it enough. Silvano, alone, could not be induced to admire it.

‘Oh, I daresay it is a work of art!’ he said rigidly. ‘I will not deny that the fellow knows how to paint. But I do not like it. Amore does not look like that.’

‘Sometimes. When she is grave and

thoughtful,' said Signora da Costa. 'Oh yes; it is certainly wonderfully like her.'

Even Della Varazia was fairly pleased with his work. But with his satisfaction at its completion was mingled a strong tinge of regret. He had enjoyed those quiet uneventful weeks more than he could have believed possible. In leaving them behind, it seemed to him that he was also leaving a rare and precious glimpse of beauty that would not come again into his life.

This undefined regret made him rather silent and abstracted when he went to the Villa, his last afternoon at Z-ia, to say good-bye to the Da Costas before he returned to Rome.

Farewells were always painful to him. His reserve and shyness made him shun all those little surface emotions that are the only betrayals of feeling sanctioned by conventionality.

He found the Cavaliere and Signora da

Costa, with Silvano, in the garden. But, though he waited some time in hopes of seeing Amore, she did not make her appearance.

‘Has the Signorina deserted us?’ he asked at last. ‘I should like to say good-bye to her, and thank her for the patience she has shown at our sittings.’

Silvano, who was lounging on his back on the grass, flung round at this, and fixed a pair of scowling eyes on the speaker, as though he would ask what business he had to wish to see Amore.

Signora da Costa dared not betray the girl’s whereabouts lest the anger should be turned on herself; so she left it to her husband to answer.

‘She went up the hill some time ago,’ said the Cavaliere. ‘I daresay if you walk that way you will meet her coming home. Silvano, you saw which direction she took?’

Silvano moved uneasily at this indiscretion.

‘Come with me,’ said Guido cheerfully. ‘You will get as fat as a tenor if you lie about in a garden all day like this.’

Silvano scowled; how dared his rival add insult to injury by treating him with scornful friendliness.

‘I am not coming,’ he said shortly, seeing that Guido waited for him; and he added under his breath, ‘Two for company, three for trumpery. Why should *I* come?’

Then, as he watched Guido's retreating figure pass down the trellised *pergola* that led out of the garden, tears of mortification sprang into his eyes.

As Guido climbed the hill, under the silver olives, he was forcibly reminded of the first time he and Amore had trodden that path together. How often they had walked there since! He recalled their meeting in the little chapel, when she had turned to him with that magic smile, the memory of which sent a thrill through him even now.

Would they meet again in future days?

he wondered ; and if so, would the promise of her girlhood have been fulfilled, and her mind have grown equal in beauty to her perfect face? For a moment he felt a sharp pang at the thought that if it were so it would not belong to him. That he should have come so near to his ideal, and yet, out of a purely egoistic cowardice, have let it pass out of his hands into those of another.

It was in this mood, which seemed to bring him into closer touch with her warm and tender girlhood, that he found Amore, sitting in dreamy meditation, on a flower-covered bank, at her favourite resting-place.

She was dressed in the same white gown, the same shady hat, that she had worn when first Guido saw her. Some unacknowledged fancy had prompted her to wear it again on the day when they were to part. Then, with a revulsion of shyness, she had been afraid to meet him, and had hidden herself up here, on the hillside.

She did not hear Guido's footsteps until he was close beside her smiling down on her with a kind of regretful tenderness. Then she turned her head, with a little start, and a flush of delicate rose-colour flew to her cheeks.

'They told me I should find you here,' he said, seating himself beside her. 'I was afraid I should not see you to say good-bye. Not that I like good-byes ; I generally try to avoid them. But this time I hope it is only *à rivederla* ; also, I wish to thank you for submitting so patiently to those long sittings, when I know you were pining to be out in the air and sunshine.'

'That was nothing,' she said quickly. 'You were not very strict with me. It was for you that the time was wasted.'

She did not say that to force a compliment ; it was only the simple expression of her thought. It never entered her head that she, of all women, could be the realisation of an artist's dream.

As Guido looked at her, his regret at leaving so lovely a vision became more poignant than ever.

‘It was not waste of time,’ he said, after a moment. ‘I don’t think words can express what you have done for me.’

She did not answer, but looked up inquiringly, with the rich rose-hue still in her cheeks.

‘Shall I tell you something?’ he went on. ‘Years ago, when I was passing through Z-ia, a face flashed across my sight. It was a girl’s face, and a very lovely one. I could not forget it. It haunted me, not only because it was so lovely, but because it was the very type and image of the beauty I had been looking for all my life. It was my ideal of human loveliness. Am I boring you with my confession? Most people think that an artist, prating about his ideal, is simply a fool in the height of his folly.’

‘I do not think so,’ she said, smiling softly.

‘Well, I came here again and again in the

hope of seeing that face. But in vain. Until, at last, I found you, Signorina, as you were praying in the chapel. Do you remember?’

‘I remember. It was one of the first summer days.’

‘After that, I did not have to look any farther. Do you understand, now, what a debt of gratitude I owe you?’

She had lowered her eyes at his last words, and now raised them, with a half frightened fixity of expression, to the view that spread out before them, through an opening in the wood.

Guido's glance followed hers, far away over the cultivated marsh lands, the fields of ripening corn and maize, where the little brown *grilli* were singing, and where, here and there, shone the silver ribbon of a canal; away towards the shimmering sea, over which the setting sun was pouring a crimson flood; and then again, to where the rose-tinged marble mountains pierced, like a mystic dreamland, into the daffodil sky.

‘Your country is a very beautiful one,’ he said; and Amore remembered that he had spoken just those words, on this very spot, the first time they had met.

‘Yes. It is a beautiful world,’ she said, with a burst of thanksgiving for the fulness of glad young life that was hers. ‘It is a beautiful thing to be alive.’

‘The world is beautiful,—yes. But life is not worthy of it. If it were, it would be heaven itself. What one looks forward to most in life is the end of it.’

‘No, no; I wish there was no end. I wish it would last for ever. I would rather live and suffer, than not live at all!’ she cried in passionate protest. ‘And you! Why will you not let yourself be glad of it? You who have everything.’

‘Do you think I am so discontented? Perhaps I am as bad as a child crying for the moon. But how can a man help it when once he has seen a glimpse of the light that puts everything else into the shade? There

is a higher life,—God helping me I will reach it some day,—a pure, bright life, where the soul is no longer in slavery to the body. You understand it,' he added suddenly. 'You, too, know what it is to long for a perfect knowledge—a perfect love.'

He was looking at her intently ; yet he did not notice that she was trembling like a leaf, and that the strange look of fear and apprehension had gathered again in her eyes. He was following his own train of thought and was scarcely thinking of her, as he went on in a musing tone.

'Sometimes I wonder if I have overlooked the right road to happiness. I have tried most ways—I have tried knowledge, and surely there can be no surer road than that? They talk of the powers of love ; but that I have not tried. Is it possible that it can lie there?'

She did not answer ; but after a moment she rose with a little shiver, saying it was time to go home.

They walked down the narrow path together. The sunset light had turned the stems of the trees into molten gold. The air was still warm and sweet with the thousand perfumes that the day's heat had drawn from rosemary and myrtle; here, a green lizard flashed across their path like a streak of emerald; from the village below rose the faint, silvery vibrating notes of a mandoline, and the rollicking song of a peasant lad troling one of the quaint old Tuscan *Stornelli*.

'Do you know, Signorina,' said Guido presently, still pursuing his own thoughts, 'it has sometimes struck me that you, if you looked for it, could find out the secret that has baffled so many of us.'

'I?' She shook her head. 'Why should you think so?'

'That I cannot explain. It is only a passing thought. But ever since I first saw you, I have had strange, momentary convictions that you, if you would, and you

only, could help me in the search. Your beauty,—your goodness.’

‘Oh, do not say that!’ she whispered. ‘It frightens me. I am not what you think. How could I help you?’

‘I do not know,’ he answered absently; ‘if you, yourself, do not know it too.’

Even then it did not strike him that what he was saying would, with any other man, have been a direct avowal of love. But when he looked again at the girl’s face, and met her eyes raised to his, full of the purest passion of devotion, he understood whither his words had led him, beyond a point which he had never dreamed of passing.

‘Together we could seek the perfect life,’ he went on, his voice so deep and tender that she could have wept for joy, ‘if you will come and help me.’

‘I would help you with my life, if that were needed,’ she whispered; her eyes, as they met his, glowing like fair stars in a midnight sky.

He bent down and kissed her cheek, gently, tenderly, as one might touch a delicate asphodel bloom. Then they walked on side by side in a silence that, with Amore, was the silence of tremulous emotion—with Guido that of deep and conflicting thought.

Had he committed a folly—nay more, a sacrilege, in binding this young life, in its freshness, to his, that had long ago buried all the warmth and enthusiasm of youth?

What could be a more glorious task than that of training and educating an eager soul for the higher life,—raising it from the love of physical objects to the love of absolute beauty?

And yet, with all the curious, unexpected feeling of exultation that his sudden action had brought to him, there came the old gnawing sense of failure, and of shrinking from a possible disillusion.

For he knew that it would be a disillusion; that, through his own fatal subjection to the

ideal, the most beautiful of earthly realities would turn under his touch to dust and ashes.

He did not speak until they had reached the Villa garden, and had passed half-way down the *pergola*, with its wreathing Passion-flowers. Then he suddenly paused, and turned his deep serious eyes upon the girl. His heart was touched afresh by her beauty.

She was looking up with something of an inspired radiance in her wonderful eyes. There was the glow of richest life and hope in her emotional face; a flashing smile parted her full red lips.

Standing there under the drooping, purple blossoms of the Passion-flowers, she was, herself, the loveliest image of warm and passionate life.

‘How beautiful you are!’ cried Guido.

But she did not hear him. She was in a dream, and the words that were ringing softly in her ears were these, out of the most

perfect of all love stories that ever were written—

'Of a surety I have now set my feet on that point of life beyond the which he must not pass who would return.'

'Here is a Deity stronger than I, who, coming, shall rule over me.'

PART II

K

CHAPTER VII

‘She shall be mine ; and I will make
A lady of my own.’—WORDSWORTH.

THERE was a good deal of surprise and conjecture amongst Della Varazia’s friends when they heard that he was actually going to commit the folly (for such he had always professed to consider it) of entering into the bonds of matrimony.

It was a matter of course that the bride should be miraculously beautiful, gifted, and superior in intellect to the rest of her sex.

It would not have been Guido if he had chosen a wife who was quite like other women. The question was—What manner of woman had succeeded in overcoming

his prejudices, and persuaded him to exchange an ideal for a human love?

There were some rather scoffing prophecies concerning the future *ménage* of Guido and his 'kindred spirit.' Was she a being above the need of earthly sustenance? Did her daily nourishment consist of such ambrosial food as fruits of luscious taste and hue, purple grapes with golden juice, melons of amber and orange, and ripe figs with bursting hearts of crimson? Would Guido keep her immured in a harmonious shrine, hidden from the profane eyes of all but his most trusted friends? Was she a source of inspiration, or the object of a pure devotion, the choice of his intellect, or of his heart?

Della Varazia's wife! One might as well try to form an accurate conception of a naiad, a goddess, a transcendental spirit from another sphere, sent to earth for Guido's special delectation.

Lorenzo Fabei, Guido's most intimate friend, was the only person who suggested anything practical or human. He argued that as the cleverest men generally marry the stupidest women, probably Della Varazia's betrothed was good, beautiful, but a trifle dull—as full of commonplace hopes and interests as he was the reverse. And that before a year had passed, Guido would help her to look over the household accounts as though no such dream as an ideal union of kindred spirits had ever existed in his visionary brain.

The wedding, which took place in Rome, answered one question to everybody's satisfaction. The beauty of young Signora della Varazia became the talk of the town, both in society, which represented the social status of the bride, and in the artistic world, from which Guido's friends flocked to the ceremony in idle speculation. She was beautiful—a dream, a vision, no term could be too extravagant.

It was no longer matter for surprise that Della Varazia had broken his vows of celibacy.

Fabei had to acknowledge that his judgment had been at fault. She could not be commonplace with that curiously intellectual face, and those fathomless eyes—eyes ‘charged with dreams,’ that seemed ready to awaken, at the voice of love, to the richest and most passionate life.

‘She is in love with him,’ he told himself the first time he saw them together. ‘And she is intensely, pathetically human. Guido is an idealist. Can she draw him down to her warmer level, or will he succeed in raising her up to his?’

It was not until after the honeymoon, when they returned to Rome for the winter, that Fabei made fuller acquaintance with Signora della Varazia, and returned to the old friendly and familiar footing with Guido.

When your best friend marries it is always an open question whether you may still keep up the intimacy, with all its free and easy comfort, or be thrust back into the secondary position of a mere acquaintance. In nine cases out of ten the latter is the humiliating truth; and Fabei was conscious of a slight feeling of formality when, one November afternoon, he stopped before the well-known, many-storied Palazzo, at the summit of which Guido had lived for many years.

He dared no longer rush upstairs, without introduction, to idle away an afternoon smoking and chatting in the large airy studio, whilst Guido either continued his work, or—as he had oftenest done of late—discarded manual labour for the easier task of theorising on one subject after another, in that casual, irrelevant manner sanctioned in the unconventional little world of Bohemia.

Fabei had often expressed his opinion

strongly in favour of matrimony. But to-day, as he climbed the endless flight of white stone steps, he was thinking that, after all, when a man marries his good days are over, the delicious freedom of bachelor-hood exchanged for an irksome restraint and decorum.

On one of the landings he met Nicolo Podesti, the little tenor, who nodded him a greeting.

‘On your way to pay your respects up above, Signor Conte?’ he asked. ‘Our Guido has brought home his Madonna. He will not want us running in and out there now, eh? It is not all of us who have a Madonna fit to make the dead heart of Raffaele beat again.’

‘Has she made our friend’s beat a little faster, Coco? Do you think we shall get some heart in the pictures now? If she does that, we shall have a second Raffaele yet, *amico mio*.’

‘Who will paint for us the mother of

intelligence instead of the mother of love!' said Coco, shrugging his shoulders. 'That will be the new type.'

'Marble for fire—a bad bargain,' laughed Fabei as he passed on. 'You and I, my little Coco, will not worship at the new shrine.'

'Nevertheless, if I have eyes in my head, there has been a very pretty boy worshipping there already,' called back Coco knowingly. 'A very pretty fellow, as full of love as a little Cupid of Correggio, and a Signor Conte into the bargain.'

'*Chut*,' whispered Fabei warningly. 'The Madonna's husband!' and, as Coco's rotund little shape vanished, the door of Della Varazia's studio was flung open, and Guido, in a faded old painting blouse, stood in the doorway.

'At last, Lorenzo!' he exclaimed cheerily.

'We have been expecting you every day. Come in! Come in! Has the *Tramontana* got into your bones that you move so like

the tortoise? What are you thinking of?’

‘*Ebbene!* You understand—when a man marries, one does not come and take his house by assault,’ said Fabei, reassured by a familiar odour of tobacco that issued through the open door. ‘The best of friends must have a little discretion in these matters.’

Guido laughed, and dragged him into the studio.

‘You shy? Calm yourself, my good Lorenzo. She—my—er—my wife is in the next apartment. She has been sitting to me all the morning, and is taking a siesta. I am a selfish brute; I forget that these delicate creatures are not constituted of iron. Sit down. No; I have done enough work for to-day. I will talk instead. There is a whole world’s history to tell me. What is going on in the studios? Has Ercole finished his equestrian statue yet? When last I saw it, the rider was not at home in the saddle. And the Monaldini-Arvotti quarrel?’

Is it still at furnace heat? What will the authorities say to Negroni's article in the—— I have heard nothing—nothing, since I have been away.'

Evidently he was faithful to all his former interests. As the two men discussed the latest events in the world of art and literature, Fabei almost forgot the existence of Signora della Varazia, until the conversation veered round to Guido's own doings.

Guido then confessed that his wife had inspired him with a new *motif*, and that his absence from Rome had been a penance of idleness, from which he had escaped with delight, to return with unsatiable ardour to his work. He was very full of his latest idea, and showed Fabei two of those rapidly executed sketches, done during the heat of inspiration, which often betrayed so much more of his genius and individuality than his more elaborately finished pictures. The subject, which was taken from the *Vita Nuova*, represented the meeting of Dante

and Beatrice; and for that '*most gracious lady*,' Guido had found a very lovely model in his wife.

In both sketches the conception of Dante was the same; a dark-robed figure, with one thin, refined hand raised to his heart, the other falling by his side, and holding a volume of Plato.

The grave, ascetic face had yet something of the grace and hope of youth piercing through the outer veil of austere dreams; and in the mournful eyes, raised with humble adoration to the lady of his soul, was something of that mystic spirit of ideality of which we have so clear a vision in the passionate love song of his youth.

In one sketch the Beatrice, clad in deep red, the colour of love, had paused for an instant, '*when yielding salutation by the way*,' and, meeting the impassioned gaze of the poet, felt stealing over her the first dimly comprehended sway of the divine lordship of love. '*Here is a Deity stronger than I*,

who, coming, shall rule over me for henceforth.'

In the slowly-lifted, dream-laden eyes shone the burning ardour and ecstasy of her newly-acquired knowledge ; yet, in the heavy and shadowy lids there was a vague fear of the strange, incommunicable mysteries of that fuller life.

It was as Amore had looked that July evening, when she stood under the Passion-flowers of the *pergola*, whilst a comprehension of the sweetness that had newly come into her life rushed like a flood upon her heart ; and in his sketch Guido had completely made himself master of the expression that, for a moment, had transfigured her face.

In the second sketch he had made a very suggestive alteration.

In this, the Beatrice was not looking up at her lover with tremulous reciprocity of passion, but down upon him with the exalted and tranquil tenderness of one who is lifted

above all merely human emotions. Instead of the girlish, half-hesitating, half-passionate yielding to a first love, there was the calm graciousness of a divinely beautiful woman accepting the homage of one to whom she would grant his desire, not so much for love's own sake, as for the sake of being able to raise him by love to something higher, purer, richer, than he had ever dreamed of reaching.

'I have decided on using the second sketch,' said Guido, after Fabei had looked at the drawings for a few moments in silence. 'It seems to me to express the most, and to be altogether the most satisfactory of the two.'

'*Diana!* As if I did not know it!' cried Fabei. 'As usual, Guido, you are sacrificing the feeling for the idea. You originate a real, breathing masterpiece when the fever of inspiration is upon you; then, when you are as cool as a cucumber, deliberately set to work to refine upon it until it is so

smothered with thoughts and ideas that it chokes one to try and take them all in, and the picture becomes only fit for the frontispiece of a philosophical treatise. Man! where are your senses?’

‘You are honest, Lorenzo; you express the opinion of the world. Are you determined to put me out of conceit with my “frontispiece” almost before it is begun?’

‘No. It will be a fine picture in either case. I am not afraid of congratulating you on it already. But I do consider one study more perfect than the other, and am provoked that you think differently. No doubt you have admirable reasons. You always have. I do not profess to have deep reasons for anything.’

‘The one you prefer is certainly the most like Amore. It is the most physically beautiful. I own that I have a weakness in favour of it,’ answered Guido, looking at the sketch with a kind of lingering regret. ‘But it is not the Beatrice of Dante. I had

to think of it in that light, you understand. I am not trying to paint another sentimental Romeo and Juliet; there are enough of them in the world already.'

'The Beatrice of the *Vita Nuova* was love,' said Fabei. 'This represents her well enough.'

'You are wrong. The Beatrice of Dante was the divine knowledge that raises one through love of abstract beauty. But she was not love as the world understands it.'

'Oh, well! Have it as you like. I give it up. By all means paint your Beatrice in cap and gown like a student of Padua. Your meaning will then be clear to us. Guido, I am beginning to think that you are a fool—an idiot of the first water.'

'Yes—yes. I know it. I agree with you!' cried Guido with mournful impatience, walking restlessly to and fro. 'It becomes more evident to me every day. All the old landmarks, the old truths, seem to be slipping out of my grasp. The very beauties of

nature—of light and colour, and the mystery in things—come to me through a mist. I am losing the strength of perception just at what ought to be the most vigorous period in a man's life. Heaven knows, I have tried hard enough to rid myself of worldly influences, and to make my life a concentrated effort after the highest good.'

'What is the highest good? We poor fools do not know. It all resolves itself into that, Guido.'

“*The elementary fire burns; the heavenly fire vivifies; the super-celestial fire loves,*”

Guido said quickly. 'I have quenched the first, but I am given neither of the others in exchange. I have nothing left but the hell-fire of unutterable longing.'

'*Piano!* Life is not so bad as that,' said Fabei, laying his hand on his friend's shoulder and checking him in his impatient walk. 'You, at least, have brought down into your life a spark of the super-celestial fire. Is not that enough to satisfy even you,

blind fool though we have both agreed you to be? You have your wife.'

Guido dropped into a chair and lit a cigarette to soothe himself.

'Yes,' he said meditatively. 'She is a great interest to me.'

Fabei did not answer. He was still looking at the discarded sketch with a half cynical smile on his lips.

'It is very strange,' went on Guido after a pause, 'inexplicably strange to see how a girl's education is always systematically neglected. Amore is as ignorant as a child. She has everything to learn.'

'To tell the truth, I was afraid you had married a Sybil—a second Corinne. Signora della Varazia looks as if she had drunk almost as deeply of knowledge as you yourself.'

'Ah! So you notice that too? It is curious, that intellectual expression in one who has only a girl's experience, a girl's unformed tastes,' said Guido, with an eager questioning in his voice that, at the time,

Fabei did not understand. 'The spirit of the thing is there, though my excellent mother-in-law did her best to dilute it by instilling every sort of insidious sentimentality. Not that I regret anything. Could there be a more deeply interesting and fascinating task than the awakening of such a mind to its own power, and then leading it, step by step, through every gradation of beauty, until the ultimate one is reached? That is now the great dream and delight of my existence. Of course the time must come when she will pass beyond me, and when it will be for her to lead, for me to follow.'

'Is the Signora as keen to learn as you to teach?' asked Fabei, watching the blue smoke curl above his head. 'She is very young, *amico mio*.'

'Oh, it is her greatest delight! We read together for two or three hours every day, discussing, explaining, initiating. Sometimes, on my honour, when she looks at me with those great eyes, I wonder how I can have

the impertinence to talk of teaching her anything. She is miles beyond me, if only she knew it. Think of it, Lorenzo!' he added, his face brightening with proud affection. 'Think of a mind equal to that face. There will never have been a woman like her since the Creation.'

'She is young; she is beautiful,' repeated Fabei. 'What if she grows tired of the world of intellect? It has its *Tramontana*, Guido.'

Guido ran his fingers through his thick hair with a gesture of impatience.

'Pah! You are a materialist, Lorenzo. The *Tramontana* with its piercing cold is twice as healthy and invigorating as the *Scirocco* that relaxes every muscle of one's body, and reduces one's brain to a jelly. I declare I am half afraid of Amore making friends with you. You will be too much in sympathy with the fallacies of her girlhood.'

'I shall be glad of it,' said Fabei carelessly.

‘I like women to have their little fallacies. What are the Signora’s, if one may ask?’

‘Perhaps she is a trifle too—*Ebbene!* too human, too impulsive, too full of enthusiasms,’ said Guido, with some hesitation. ‘It is only natural at her age. And it can be cured. In fact, it *must* be cured before she can give herself to higher things; and that is precisely what I have first got to teach her—— But I think I hear her coming. You shall form your own opinion.’

He rose and went quickly forward to hold aside the velvet curtain, that had faded from deep orange into mellower hues, from pale amber to fiery rose-pink, melting together in soft harmonies in the light and shade of the heavy folds.

She wore a loose white gown that showed the graceful outlines of her figure, and left her beautiful throat bare. Her face, framed in the shadow of her russet hair, was very full of the radiance of young and eager life.

As she passed beneath the curtain she

smiled up at Guido with the most confiding and trustful devotion. Fabei began to think that, after all, they were going to eschew transcendentalism, and relapse into a couple of the orthodox love-bird type.

She came forward, holding out both hands, and expressing her pleasure at seeing him with a winning charm of manner that delighted Fabei.

‘I have so often heard Guido talk of you,’ she said. ‘He tells me you are the best friend he has.’

‘And the severest Mentor,’ put in Guido, who was leaning against the wall, looking down at her where she sat on the broad divan, over which some richly-dyed Oriental silks were flung in artistic negligence.

‘Lorenzo must have been a bully in his cradle. What he really enjoys is to draw out one’s pet theories, and then to demolish them with Mephistophelean cynicism, until they turn into mere bathos. What could be more diabolically hard-hearted?’

Fabei laughed and did not refute the accusation, but said mockery was the best tonic in the world for Guido, and that he hoped Signora della Varazia would give him plenty of it.

‘I should not dare,’ said Amore, a little proudly. Evidently she considered such a suggestion, even when made in jest, highly irreverent. She would as soon have insulted *S. Pietro* in his chair, as ridicule the soaring fancies of her lord and master.

‘Enough of me!’ cried Guido. ‘I have been talking of myself for the last half-hour, and the subject palls. Lorenzo, I look to you to initiate Amore into the beauties of Rome. I cannot always keep her a prisoner here when I am at work, and you are the most efficient chaperon I can think of.’

‘*Anzi*. I ask nothing better.’

‘It is all new to me,’ said Amore. ‘It is very unlike Z-ia.’

‘I should think so!’ exclaimed Guido.

'Z-ia has its own charm. But you will soon say that Rome is the only place in the world. You must feel something of that already, Amore?'

'It is your home,' she answered softly.

'Do they live up in the clouds at Z-ia?' asked Fabei. 'How long shall you be able to put up with these interminable stairs, Signora? That is the worst of artists. They cannot exist in a light that is good enough for the rest of us. Why does not Guido take apartments near the *Piazza di Spagna*? It would be gayer for you. I know of a splendid studio he might get for a mere song, close at hand, in the *Via Margutta*.'

'Oh no. I like this. What is good enough for him is good enough for me,' she answered quickly. 'I want nothing better. Besides, Signore, you have not seen how comfortable I have made our room next door. You know how untidy Guido is? I have altered all that, and left

it to him to make it artistic. It really is charming. Come and see.'

As she spoke she crossed the studio, and Fabei followed her into the next apartment, which was divided from the studio only by the heavy velvet curtain.

It was certainly a delightful sanctum. Guido had expended all his taste upon it, and it was crowded with works of art, collected by him during many years, everything being a gem in its way. Here a rare bit of porcelain, a fragment of curious mosaic, a slender Etruscan vase of delicate handicraft, or a fine inlaid cabinet; here an illuminated missal, or scarce edition, bound in vellum and chased with quaint devices. Everything, from the embroidered silk draperies to the Watteau-panels over the doorways, showed a fair blending of the arts and crafts of ancient and modern skill.

In one corner stood an exquisite copy of the famous Mercury or Antinous of the

Vatican. It was the only piece of sculpture in the room, and it was one of Guido's fancies that, whenever it was possible, a tall white lily should stand near it—the aerial beauty and delicate chiselling of nature placed side by side with one of the most supreme triumphs of art that the world has ever seen.

‘This is where I have my daily lesson,’ said Amore brightly. ‘Did Guido tell you that he finds me so ignorant that he has to be my tutor? I cannot make him understand how stupid I am, but I am afraid he will soon discover that for himself.’

But her happy and untroubled glance testified that she had no very deep fears on that score. As far as she knew Guido had married her because they loved each other, not because he thought her clever. Had she thought that, perhaps her joy would have been flecked by a dim foreboding, and the tiny gossamer-like cloud

that hung, faint and undefined, over the horizon of her summer sky, would have been revealed to her eyes.

Fabei soon found himself in the position of confidant and adviser, as it were, to his friend's wife. She seemed to consider that his long friendship with, and ten years seniority to Guido, imparted a fatherly security to him. In his society she allowed herself the delightful abandonment of a girl whose innocence is her safeguard. And during their frequent meetings, when Fabei acted as her willing cicerone to the beauties of Rome, he easily learnt her transparent character by heart, and a great deal more accurately than her husband had done. For one thing, he was an impartial observer, whereas Guido only saw what he wished to see.

There were moments when Fabei felt a vague pity for her. She was so absorbed in her still new love-dream, so radiantly secure in her present happiness,

yet so unconscious of the very passion within her that contributed to her keen appreciation of life, and that sooner or later would cry out vehemently for something fuller, more alive with human emotion, than the cold, calm tenderness of philosophic interest.

Guido had asked her to help him in his life-work ; and all that she had to give,—her beauty, her youth, her love,—she gave with a generous pride in pouring out at his feet all the treasures in her possession.

There could be no fear of Guido ever failing in his duties as a husband. Whatever might be his faults, he was not only a lip-professor of high morality, but had always, in a quiet unobtrusive way, managed to preserve a certain fine and fastidious standard of honour by which he endeavoured to rule his conduct.

He saw that his wife was happy, and meant to keep her so. He was invariably gentle and considerate, treating her with a

lover's deferential homage, and in developing her intellect, in opening her eyes to high truths, he spared neither time nor patience, always expecting her to blossom, some not far distant day, into that fair and high-souled ideal of his dreams.

He kept her closely guarded from the influences of the world, only a select number of his friends being admitted into the privacy of his married life. But such society as she saw was brilliant enough. It was considered a privilege to be allowed to join those delightful little reunions at the Palazzo Corelli, *Piano* 5, where the conversation was of the brightest, and the company all, more or less, chosen spirits,—artists, musicians, *littérateurs*—who were well able to appreciate Guido's genius, his wife's beauty, and the general tone of intellectual depth and freedom which Guido seemed to carry about with him as his peculiar atmosphere.

Every one liked and admired Signora della Varazia. The younger men went

farther, raving enthusiastically over her loveliness, and the dignified charm of her manner. But no one mentioned her intellect, though, on first meeting her, and judging by the beautiful seriousness about eyes and lips, people were always prepared to find in her the female counterpart of Guido. And, perhaps, the discovery that she was simply a sweet-natured, loving-hearted woman, instead of a student of philosophy or a melancholy seeker after an ideal, was rather a relief than otherwise.

She seldom joined in a general conversation; when she did so, it was always with a quick look at Guido as though to divine, by his face, if she were saying just what he would like her to say.

As time went on, and the cold, bright Roman winter merged into a delicious spring, these glances of shy appeal became more frequent and had in them a tinge of nervousness. Fabei noticed, too, that a shade, which grew deeper day by day, had fallen

over Guido's renewed hopefulness and vigour. Was it gradually dawning upon his perceptions that his wife, of whom he had expected such great things, was only one of those dull beautiful women of whom the world is full; as if, to those who have received the 'fatal gift of beauty,' more could not be given, and from whom the highest intellect is withheld?

It was about this time that Fabei's attention was attracted to one of the most constant habitués of Signora della Varazia's salon—the young 'gran signor,' whose prepossessing appearance Nicolo Podesti had compared with an amorous Cupid of Correggio. At first the young man used to sit silent in a corner, his glowing dark eyes fixed on Amore. It was easy enough for a shrewd observer to guess his secret, carefully as he imagined it to be hidden; and there was something touching in his spasmodic efforts to conquer it, and, above

all, not to hint at it to Amore. He had not sufficient strength of mind to tear himself away from her. But he asked for no more than to be able to look at her, to talk to her on trivial and impersonal matters, and to know that she, at least, was happy.

He had learnt to bear, without wincing, the tokens of her unconcealed devotion to Guido. But what did make his blood boil, was the want of passion in Guido's affection for her. What would not he have given to be in his place ?

Fabei took a half-amused interest in him ; he looked so rebelliously unhappy, and it so evidently went against the sunniness of his nature to be so. But as time passed on he either forgot, or partly conquered his melancholy, and let his naturally boyish, animal spirits rise to the surface. In that little circle of deep thinkers, often weary with strenuous thought, he, in his warm-blooded youth, seemed to have a vigorous electricity of keen life about him which the

others lacked, and which Amore alone, though in a less apparent degree, shared with him.

Fabei could see that she turned to him, sometimes, with the sense of relief that a child feels when it is released from the oppressive dignity of the drawing-room to run wild and free in the nursery.

Amore and Silvano da Costa were 'but children of a larger growth;' with him she could laugh and talk without weighing her words, and without feeling upon her the weighty responsibility of her position as wife of a man of genius.

Gradually Guido discovered that his select little parties were becoming divided into two camps: an intellectual one, and a frivolous one. It began by Amore and Silvano having their own conversations apart from the more serious ones of Guido and his friends; and since women attract more by their looks than by their minds, it naturally followed that

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some of the wiser heads soon found themselves drawn towards their old friend's young and lovely wife.

The fault was certainly Silvano's. Being of an irreverent nature, he dared ridicule some of the Elect and their words of wisdom, and as long as there was no sort of reflection upon the superiority of her husband, Amore could not help laughing with him, though she felt it a kind of treason as she did so.

That was only the beginning. Had it stopped there, Guido might have been content. But Amore, in ignorance of the mistake she was committing, almost put an end for ever to the select charm Guido had been so careful to preserve in his little social gatherings. Before his marriage women had been rigorously excluded from them. Apart from the constraint their presence would have entailed, he rather despised the whole sex, as being either frivolous or dull. It was not part of his scheme of education that Amore should surround herself with

chattering women, and it never struck him that she could be weak enough to desire such companions. It was quite a shock to him when she told him she had invited certain of his friends to bring their wives with them to the Palazzo Corelli; and, though he was too kind to show his objection, he felt that the exclusive society of clever people he had taken such pains to gather round him had lost its savour. He *could not* bring himself to feel interested in the domestic troubles and joys of the commonplace wives and mothers who won Amore's quickly-given sympathies.

Fabei was with him when things reached a climax.

They had been for a long walk together, talking on all subjects under the sun,—amongst others of Amore. Guido had expressed some of his hopes for her,—what he expected her to become when her character was more fully developed,—a creature altogether 'too bright and good, For human

nature's daily food,' as Fabei mockingly told him.

After this conversation, the sight that greeted them when they returned to the Palazzo Corelli was in itself something of a mockery.

Guido hurried upstairs, with the feeling of satisfaction he always experienced when he came home to the scholastic calm of his chosen retreat even more strong within him than usual. But, half-way up, strange and unexpected sounds fell upon his ear,—laughter, shrill young voices, little feet pattering and scampering overhead—quite a small hubbub of merriment.

Guido paused in amazement.

'*Dio mio!*' he exclaimed in a voice of consternation that made Fabei laugh with malicious amusement. 'What in the name of Heaven is this?'

'Children!' ejaculated Fabei. 'Sacrilege, *amico mio!*'

'*CHILDREN?*' echoed Guido. 'But that

is absolutely impossible—absolutely. The saints preserve us!’

Some small arm had flung open the door of the studio, and the sight was revealed! Half a dozen children careering round and round Guido’s sanctum, pursued by Amore with outstretched arms, her eyes blindfolded by a hastily caught-up Roman scarf.

Two mothers were looking on and applauding with clapping of hands and laughter that was not at all subdued to a pitch in keeping with the calm of a scholar’s study.

For a moment or two Guido stood in the doorway looking on in silence; whilst his wife—no longer the personification of dignified and decorous wisdom, but of love itself, blindfolded—groped after her noisy little friends, cheeks flushed and hair dishevelled, her low, soft laugh mingling gaily with the shrill voices of the children.

They were all too much absorbed to notice Guido. Until at last one tiny creature,

catching sight of the two strangers, was brought to a sudden standstill, and thus fell an easy prey into the arms of Amore. She caught him with a little cry of triumph, and then, tearing the scarf from off her eyes, found herself standing face to face with Guido.

‘Ah, you have caught us!’ she exclaimed. ‘You have caught me making a child of myself. We did not expect you so early, Guido. Donna Flavia and Signora Altonini promised to bring their children to tea with me, and we have been having such games. Have we not, my little Pepito?’

She had taken the child on her lap. It passed through Guido’s mind that she looked like the loveliest of Madonnas, but the child was an ugly little fellow and spoilt the picture. The two mothers, also, were commonplace, loud-voiced — a trifle vulgar, — and much perturbed by the unexpected arrival of the great artist. Altogether, though he tried to be friendly and cheerful, he was a

wet-blanket upon the merriment, and the little party broke up hastily. He had to watch these unknown, and not very tidy little boys and girls clambering on to Amore's lap, kissing her again and again, with repeated requests that she would soon let them come again and play with her in her beautiful large room; then they were dragged away by their mothers, and went clattering downstairs, talking and laughing at the top of their voices.

When they had gone—and Fabei with them—Guido breathed a sigh of relief.

‘My dear one!’ he exclaimed, ‘what has possessed you? Where did you pick up such a friend as Donna Flavia?’

‘Poor soul! Perhaps she is a little bit vulgar. But she is a good creature. She is so poor, with all those children to bring up on next to nothing. I wanted to give them a treat. You did not mind, my Guido.’

‘Why should I?’ he answered. ‘But

not again—do you think so, Amore? Is it necessary?’

‘It seems to me, sometimes, that our life is too easy and beautiful,’ she said. ‘It makes us selfish. But if you do not like it——’

‘I have not said so,’ he interrupted. ‘It jars upon me, it is true. But if it makes you happy, well and good.’

‘Thank you, Guido *mio*,’ she said gently, slipping her hand into his.

He could not disguise his feelings from her; her love for him gave her a curiously accurate insight into his very thoughts; and after that day no friend of hers ever crossed their threshold. She understood that she had made a mistake, and that Guido della Varazia’s wife should learn to hold herself aloof from all that could by any possibility steal her thoughts from the great and sublime ideal fitted for a philosopher’s wife.

CHAPTER VIII

‘Dead perfection ; no more.’—TENNYSON.

IF any foreboding of her inadequacy to fulfil Guido’s ideal for her came to Amore, it came but faintly, so that she herself was the last to understand it. But perhaps that ever-present sense of being strung to her highest pitch was in a dim way preparing her for a comprehension of the truth that flashed across her one day, after an apparently insignificant little conversation with her husband.

Lent was over. The chill air that hangs about the streets of Rome throughout the winter had long ago been thrilled into warmth by the Sun-God, who was

turning fair Italy into a fairy-land of pure gold and serenest blue.

In the gardens of the Villa Borghese the violets and rose-coloured anemones were thrusting up their blossoms all over the glades and alleys; everything, everywhere, sang of the gushing life of the spring, and of the coming glory of the summer. But on such days, beautiful as Rome, that city of the gods, is in springtime, Amore's heart turned with unconquerable yearning to the sylvan haunts of her girlhood,—the soft, wild, luxuriant loveliness of the hills and valleys and fair coasts of the Riviera. After all those months of concentrated endeavour to raise herself to Guido's level, to thrust into the past her old childish delight in the mere facts of living and loving, that she might pierce the occult mysteries of art and learning that made up the sum of Guido's interests, it suddenly seemed to her one day, when she felt a little tired and depressed, that all her efforts had been sheer waste, her belief that

she could be satisfied with this, so-called, higher life, only a delusion into which she had been beguiled by the fervour of her affections, with an extravagant impetuosity that was absolutely ignorant of the magnitude of what she had undertaken. Little by little, the daily lessons with Guido had lost some of their zest. So long as he kept her at the earlier stages, she fulfilled all that was required of her. The sonnets of Petrarch, of Michael Angelo, of all those lesser lights of the Renaissance, awoke her quick and ready sympathy; and, up to a certain point, she knew and loved her Dante. That is to say, she could repeat the *Vita Nuova* word for word by heart, though she was slow to grasp Guido's allegorical interpretation of it. To her it was a simple enough story of love and death. It took away half its interest to have to remember that Beatrice was not a real, living woman, but only a poet's idea of the personification of wisdom.

And when Guido led her from the region of poetry to higher studies, he realised that much of what he said to her made no impression at all on her mind. The inevitable disillusion that had followed so quickly on all his other hopes came, in this case, only too soon. Not here would he find his ideal. The mystery of her beauty was not in her intellect; there *was* no mystery in it; but only the inherited nobility of the thinker's forehead, and a deceptive dreaminess in the curve of mouth and eyelids.

Did it never pass through his thoughts that the mystery, if mystery there were, might be beyond his sight,—not to be comprehended by him, even were he to see it lying before his eyes?

Thus, slowly and imperceptibly, the magnetic sympathy that, at first, had drawn them towards each other became weaker, until its power almost ceased altogether. And yet, they both still hoped and believed;

she, that all he desired from her was love; he, that even yet he might make manifest to her that perfect happiness is only to be attained by rising superior to all those earthly pettinesses and enthusiasms that bring regret and disappointment in their train.

One day, when the glowing splendour of an Italian May had stirred Amore's young pulses with eager longing to be once more roaming amongst the hills and woods of Liguria, a new light broke upon her mind.

In Rome it was hot and airless. Every one, except the artists, was gone, or talking of going, to the country. Her two best friends, Fabei and Silvano da Costa, had come that morning to say good-bye to her until November should find them all again in Rome. She was homesick; and there was a little feeling of desertion about everything that affected her spirits. Her thoughts kept wandering away from what Guido was reading, or, if she did listen, his

words came to her without any meaning. It mattered little to her what Epicurus thought and said hundreds of years ago, whether he had lived for the passing moment only, and taught a sensuous philosophy or not. She had no need to trouble herself about the past, nor, for that matter, about the future either. All she cared about was the quick, conscious life of the present, whilst she was young, loved and loving, and growing with the glad springtime towards a perfect summer.

Presently Guido paused in his reading and looked at her. She was sitting by his side at the inlaid, book-littered table near the window, where they had spent many peacefully happy hours together. But, just now, the eyes that were generally bent with studious attention on her book were gazing out of the open window, and growing soft and luminous with a throng of golden memories. Not that there was much to see; only the tall Palazzo opposite shining a

hard white in the sun, and, above it, a strip of warm blue sky.

‘Did you understand the last sentence?’ asked Guido. ‘It is rather abstruse, and I think you are a little absent-minded, *mia cara*.’

She turned to him with her soft, slow smile. ‘Ah, forgive me, my Guido! I do not think I am in the mood for study. My thoughts had flown away back to last year at Z-ia.’

He closed the book, still looking at her half curiously.

‘*Ebbene!* We will not study unless you wish it. Of what were you thinking so deeply?’

‘I was thinking—’ she hesitated and coloured a little; then, ‘Do you remember what to-day is?’ she asked, leaning towards him, and letting her eyes rest on his.

‘To-day? No; dear one. What is it?’

‘Think—think of last year.’

He shook his head.

‘No. I do not follow you, Amore.’

She looked disappointed for a moment.

‘It is a year to-day since first we met,’ she said. ‘Had you forgotten, Guido?’

‘No, I had not forgotten. It is indeed a year ago. How little we guessed then what the end would be.’

‘I think I always guessed it, from the first,’ she said quickly. ‘I knew, that day in the chapel, that love was coming to me.’

‘Strange child. And did it come?’

‘Yes, yes. Greater than ever I had expected. Oh, Guido, it has been so much to me; everything—sometimes, almost more than I can bear.’

Her head was drooping near his shoulder, her love-lit eyes still looking deeply into his, in which, instead of any answering light, there was only the indulgent attention one might lend to the prattlings of a child.

‘I forget nothing of that time,’ she went on; ‘not a word. Often and often, when you and my father were deep in discussions,

I used to think what folly it all was, and that nothing matters in this world except love. Then I would meet your eyes, and know that you were thinking the same thing. You remember, Guido?’

He drew a long breath, like one who has received a cold shock.

‘Is that what you were thinking?’ he asked. ‘Did you believe the spell that drew us together was only the same old earthly love—thoughts that all the world can feel? Nothing higher and deeper?’

‘What could be higher and deeper?’ she said; and as she asked the question it seemed to her that she already knew what was coming—something against which she would combat until her life’s end.

‘Knowledge, Wisdom, Absolute Beauty, which, as Plato tells us, stands with Temperance on a chaste pedestal,’ he answered. ‘And that, from the nature of it, is incompatible with earthly passions.’

‘Then is that what you meant when you

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asked me to help you find the perfect life ?' she asked very low, her hands clasped tightly together.

'Yes. What else could it mean, *carina* ?'

She drew away from him with a mirthless laugh, that carried away with it all the pure, blissful hopes of her girlhood.

'Ah—indeed, yes. What else could it mean ?' she repeated. 'We are both wrong. If your idea is folly, mine is worse folly. But do you know, Guido,'—she tried to speak gaily,—'I believe that I do not, in my heart, care much for these higher studies. I do not see that they lead to anything but discontent. Is it very wrong of me ? Ah ! well, I am stupid ; I have always known that I am stupid. Not nearly clever enough for you, Guido.'

'You do not know yourself,' he said kindly. 'You must be patient.'

'Yes. I do know myself !' she cried. 'I know what I can give you and what I cannot. I cannot bring you wisdom ; I can only

bring you love. And that I give you without stint—without ceasing—my whole heart, Guido,—if you will have it.'

In her excitement she had risen, and stood before him like a beautiful vision of impassioned love, her eyes on fire, her red lips quivering.

All the artist in Guido was aroused.

'How beautiful you are!' he exclaimed. 'Stay like that for a moment. If only I could catch your expression now, it would be superb.'

But she sank listlessly back into her chair, her hands falling loosely on to her lap.

'You cannot catch it,' she said indifferently. 'You know how often you have tried. There must be something in it that you do not understand. It is soul-less, soul-less—and you will not learn to see it.'

CHAPTER IX

‘No, I am not for thee. Thou art too new,
I am too old, to the old beaten way.
The griefs are not the same which grieve us two :
Thy thought and mine lie far apart to-day.’

NOVEMBER had come again. The malaria, that all through the summer months had laid its devastating hand on the lovely gardens of the Borghese, and over the hot, flower-decked Campagna, had, in its turn, been smitten with death by the fresher breezes of autumn ; and once more the streets of the Eternal City were thronged with life and motion.

Just a year after his first call on Signora della Varazia, Lorenzo Fabei found himself again wending his way towards the Palazzo Corelli. As he walked down the *Via*

Condotti he stopped now and then to look in at the gay shop-windows—here bright with strings of pink and red coral from Naples, here shining with huge jewels sparkling like bits of scintillating glass, here displaying rich brocades and gorgeous Oriental hangings; or copies in marble or alabaster of the well-known statues with whose fair outlines one becomes so familiar as one treads the streets of Rome.

Just as he turned under the archway of the courtyard of the old Palazzo, with its ever-rippling fountain, Fabei caught sight of Silvano da Costa wandering aimlessly down the street, pausing every now and then to look in at a shop-window, with the abstracted gaze of a man whose wishes lead him in one direction, his duty or common sense in another.

When he saw Fabei he hurried to join him, as if glad of an excuse to end his indecision, and turned with him into the cool courtyard.

‘Well met, *Silvano mio*. I did not know you were in Rome. How long have you been back?’ asked Fabei, pausing beside the fountain before he knocked at the entrance door of the Palazzo. ‘I only came home myself yesterday.’

‘Oh, I have been here some time—nearly three weeks,’ said Silvano. ‘I daresay it was a sin to leave the hills so soon. But—*Ebbene!* I came, and that is all there is to say about it.’

The two men had become close friends, perhaps all the closer from the disparity between their ages. And since Fabei had spent three or four weeks with him at his villa among the Abruzzi, Silvano had come to look upon him as a safe and trustworthy guide in most matters.

‘Well? How are they getting on here?’ asked Fabei. ‘Is the Beatrice finished?’

‘Yes. Very much finished. Refined and double refined,’ answered Silvano. ‘He has put his whole mind and soul into it, and

that, I suppose, is saying his whole self. He is all soul and intellect, isn't he? Not common flesh and blood like you or I?'

'Then it is a success? Is he satisfied at last, poor Guido?'

Silvano shrugged his shoulders, and turned out the palms of his hands, with a healthy contempt for the longings and discontents of a class of men whom he considered closely allied to the weaker sex.

'Satisfied? Are painters ever satisfied? Much less Guido. That is the worst of artists. They slave and grind, and work themselves, first into a frenzy of rapture, then into black despair, over a harmony on canvas that doesn't give the poor devils half so much satisfaction, when it is finished, as we get out of a good day's fox-hunting over the Campagna. I would not be an artist—no, not I, *per Bacco*.

'Love is a foolish riot,
And to be loved is a burden;
Who loves and is loved in quiet
Has all the world for his guerdon.'

‘And the Signora? Beautiful as ever, I suppose. Have you seen her lately?’

‘Yes—I think you will find her changed,’ he answered, suddenly sobering. ‘I have seen a great deal of her,’ he added, looking Fabei straight in the face, with a kind of defiance in his quick, dark eyes.

‘Come, then! Instead of discussing them, let’s go upstairs. Nicolo Podesti is sure to keep us gossiping for half an hour on the way.’

They found Guido alone in the studio, not painting, but gazing in an abstracted way at some designs on a table before him, and with a ponderous folio open on his knee. But he sprang up when Fabei and Silvano entered, welcoming them with the genial charm of manner he reserved for his special friends. It struck Fabei that his fine thoughtful face was loftier and colder than ever, and that his gaiety was a little forced, as though it were an effort to bring himself down from his dream-land to the world of reality.

‘You want to see Amore,’ he said presently. ‘I will call her. She will be glad to see you again, Lorenzo.’

When he went to hold back the velvet curtain dividing the two rooms, the action reminded Fabei forcibly of his visit there a year before. There was the same un-failing deference, the tactful observance of those little attentions that so seldom outlive the honeymoon. Fabei almost expected again to see the white-robed figure standing against the background of faded reds and oranges; again to see the flashing smile of affection with which the bride of a year ago had glanced up at her husband.

Perhaps it was this expectation that made him experience something of a shock when she really came—young and beautiful still, yet not the bride of a year ago. She wore a very simple, close-fitting black dress, fastened at the throat by a single ruby that throbbed as it caught the light, like a heart

warm with young life; and, except for that, and her heavy knot of red-gold hair, there was not a sign of colour about her. Her face, beautiful and serious, was pale with that Southern pallor which, beside our Northern whiteness, has in itself almost the depth and warmth of colour. Her eyes, under their languorous lids, were very quiet and dreamy; and as she moved slowly forward to greet Fabei she showed none of the old unconstrained pleasure with which she used to make him welcome.

‘You are just in time to see Guido’s picture before it goes to be exhibited,’ she said, after the first greetings were over. ‘He has been longing to hear your opinion of it.’

‘I expect yours is much more valuable,’ said Fabei. ‘You are versed in its hidden lore.’

‘I? Oh no,’ she said, with a faint smile. ‘I do not understand art. There are very few things I do understand.’

‘Fabei knows beforehand what to expect of my pictures,’ said Guido lightly, though there was an undercurrent of bitterness in his voice. ‘This has failed just where the others have failed.’

‘Nonsense! I hear that it is a masterpiece. Courage, *mio amico*. At all events let me see it.’

Guido drew aside a curtain which prevented the light from falling too brightly on a large picture at the far end of the studio, and beckoned to Fabei to come nearer.

His own face was a study as he waited for his friend’s criticism. As Silvano said, he had put his whole being into the picture. For months he had thought of little else. It was to be the supreme crowning effort of his life; to express, in its perfect beauty, all the mystery of life and death and immortality; in a word—to live.

In the anxiety of his gaze as he tried to read Fabei’s answer in his face, and in the

half-mournful tenderness with which his eyes kept wandering to the picture, one might have read his secret. He had failed, and he knew it.

‘It is wonderful,’ said Fabei, after a pause. He could not say anything more whilst Guido’s anxious and searching eyes were upon him.

It was a masterpiece in its way. From a merely artistic point of view it was as nearly perfect as possible. Dexterity and sure power of hand, colour in its purest depth and coolness, loftiness of thought and conception, were there, not to be denied. But the old fault of Guido’s pictures was also there.

It was an intellectual gem — no more. He had refined away feeling—emotion—all the humanising element which alone could have made it live.

‘*Per Bacco!* But I should be eaten up with pride if I were you, Guido!’ exclaimed Silvano, the quick bright tones of his voice

dispelling the little cloud that had fallen upon them all.

He professed a contempt for artists as a white-livered race, and the 'Dante and Beatrice' conveyed but little to his mind beyond the fact that Beatrice was a disappointing likeness of his cousin.

But he hated to see a man fail, after he had struggled hard in any cause; and Guido's unspoken disappointment filled him with good-natured sympathy. It seemed to make Guido more human for the moment.

'Yes. We must bring back your self-confidence, Guido. You ought to be proud of this. Ought not he, Signora?' said Fabei, appealing to Amore.

She was sitting in one of the deep, wood-panelled embrasures of the windows, her head drooping a little, as though weighed down by its wealth of hair. Her hands, folded loosely on her lap, showed very white and soft against the black dress. There was a little wanness about the

once delicately curved cheeks—a want of the intense expressiveness that had before infused such rarity into her loveliness; and the change was very perceptible in her loss of beauty.

She had not betrayed much interest in what was being said. But when Fabei addressed her she looked up suddenly, and her answer came with curious directness.

‘I cannot imagine any man being in love with such a woman,’ she said slowly. ‘She is cold as ice; she would freeze the folly out of him.’

As she spoke she raised her eyes, and in their passionate depths Fabei saw that her composed quietism and want of life were but external. The impulsive fire of youth was still there, suppressed and stifled, but slowly smouldering, ready, at a breath, to burst out into vivid flame. But the glance was only momentary, checked as quickly as it had come. Again she lowered her eyes, and sat there cold and expressionless.

‘That is what struck me, too,’ said Silvano, in a lower tone, joining her in the embrasure. ‘But I am too ignorant to be a critic. One can only judge by what one feels. For myself, *per Bacco*, I would as soon walk down the crater of Vesuvius as dare to love Guido’s Beatrice. Dante must have been a bold fellow.’

‘Love is a ridiculous thing,’ said Amore, smiling back into his face, then glancing at Guido with a little sigh.

‘Most ridiculous,’ said Silvano gaily, though his eyes were not in tune with his words.

‘Love is a foolish riot,
And to be loved is a burden. . . .’

Guido dropped the curtain over the picture, and he and Fabai drew a little apart from the two younger ones.

‘You see,’ he said bitterly, ‘it is the old story. But this time it seems to have taken the life out of me. It was, so to speak, my last and greatest chance. I

had the very picture before me at one time, and you see what I have made of it. And yet, what in the name of all the saints is wanting? I confess that I cannot see.'

'You got what you wanted in the sketch you originally made,' answered Fabei. 'Why in the world did you try to improve upon it?'

'Because it did not express my meaning. To do that I had to purge away what was carnal in it. This is what remained.'

'*Ebbene!* I can only repeat what I said once before. Get your wife to teach you.'

Guido did not answer. Fabei's last words had stirred up a host of memories and regrets and lost hopes. But there was a loyalty in him that prevented him from confessing that he had failed with his wife as he had done with his works, and that she had proved too frail and weak to be subservient to his art, or to his ideal.

Fabei felt the constraint, and hurried to break the silence.

‘Do the lessons still go on? What profound philosophies have you reached? It is time you set about constructing one of your own. When you do, it will take us all half a lifetime to learn it.’

‘Oh, we gave up the lessons long ago. They were wearisome to her, I think. The higher life has not much interest for her. It was a curious mistake of mine to believe that it had. I used to imagine that it was all written in her face. And the strange thing about it is that I very seldom see her with that expression of ideality now. I often wonder what it can have meant.’

‘She does not look strong,’ said Fabei. ‘I see a great change in her.’

‘Yes. She is losing her beauty. But I think she is quite well and happy,’ answered Guido, looking anxiously across at his wife. ‘She never complains of anything.’

Then, after a second, he added impatiently, 'There! Look at her. At this instant the old expression is there, strong as ever. Why cannot I grasp it—keep it there—make it live?'

'You must understand it first,' said Fabei quietly. 'But you never will. It is a riddle which you are too dull to answer.'

The 'Dante and Beatrice' was seen, admired, criticised, and received its due meed of interest, praise, and blame from the *vox populi*. But it was not a success. No one came to look at it twice, except young artists who wished to study Della Varazia's style, or to learn the secret of his wonderful colouring. Though it was a 'thing of beauty' it was not a 'joy for ever.' It had just missed being a great work, like so many other of his pictures, which, though they never failed as illustrations of pure beauty, conveyed neither the passion of grief nor the exuberance of joy; and, though his cold and statuesque Beatrice may have

been an admirable symbolic personation of Knowledge, the world in general, like Amore, preferred to think of Dante's Beatrice as nothing more remote and unapproachable than a beautiful and lovable woman.

After this failure, as evident to himself as it was to others, Guido shut himself up more exclusively than ever in that skyey studio of his, chosen years before during a fancy he had had of always living at a height, as near the sky as possible, as if in that clear thin air he could render more visible the far-reaching thoughts that radiated through his brain. What swift, bright secret flashed before him in the stillness of his solitude? And, when solved, what divine truth, what benign solace would it shed into the world?

Emancipation from the trammels of the flesh, with its petty and wearying humours and emotions; concentration; the power of viewing life in the white light of reason;

these were the objects for which he strove. Wrapt, now in the sage's contemplation of the whole wide Universe so full of inscrutable mystery; now in the perilous self-analysis of an intellectual egotism.

And into this concentration, this solitude of intense thought, Amore had stolen, bearing about her that warm and emotional individuality which it had been Guido's self-imposed vocation in life to crush and annihilate. His world of abstract beauty was exquisite as an icicle in sunshine. But it was its deadly chill, not its chaste loveliness, that was most manifest to the woman who loved him, and who, for his sake, pressed the benumbing crystal to her heart in the vain hope that it might freeze to death that passionate craving for a lower humanity, which prevented her from standing, hand in hand with him, on his transcendent heights.

Outwardly, at least, she conformed to his standard of unenthusiastic quietism. 'She has gained in repose,' said Guido one day;

and whether that were loss or gain, it was true. There was something hushed, still, shadowy, about her now. She seemed always as one waiting in motionless patience for something to vivify her again into youth and warmth, as she sat in his studio, the figure and head a little drooping, the white hands lying quiet and nerveless in her lap.

In this husband and wife extremes had met, as they are often supposed to do. The one set his eyes too resolutely on mental abstractions, on the Infinite; the other was over-susceptible to human loves and joys, human hopes and fears.

‘Della Varazia is making his wife very like himself,’ his friends began to say. ‘She is not very interesting, and she is fast losing her beauty. There is no life, no colour about her.’

At times even Fabei, who imagined himself fairly well acquainted with her character, thought so too, and believed that the calm self-restraint was natural to her, and

that she had outlived the impulsiveness of her girlhood.

But there were passing moments when he thought differently,—when he would catch her eyes dwelling upon Guido with a yearning that threatened to break down her self-control ; or when, in a sudden brief sentence, she would betray something of the bitterness of a heart flung back upon itself.

Guido was very kind to her in his half-sighted way. But she was not part of his life. He never told her what he did, what he hoped, what he thought. They were husband and wife—fond of each other in a calm high fashion (as though love were a kind of afterthought). But friends and companions they could never be.

‘It is a mistake for an artist to marry,’ Amore once said to Fabei, with quiet conviction. ‘His art should be his wife. It would have been better for Guido’s future fame if he had never married.’

‘His marriage was the best thing he ever

did in his life,' said Fabei rather hotly. 'He wanted humanising. Nothing is so good for a man like Guido as being in love.'

'Guido was in love with an ideal,' she said indifferently, dropping her eyes under her long lashes.

'Of which you, Signora, were the realisation.'

'Yes,' she said, with a momentary quiver of the interlaced fingers. 'But it was an ideal without a heart.'

In looking back upon the winter and spring, when, for various reasons, the fortunes of the Della Varazias formed the chief background to his thoughts, the figure that stood forward most vividly in Fabei's recollection was that of Silvano da Costa. He seemed to shine by the side of Guido and Amore, in their shadowy unreality, like the presence of life itself, with his lively, expressive face, and the quick ringing tones of his voice, even his well-known footstep as he

ran lightly up the long flight of stone stairs in the Palazzo Corelli, singing or whistling his favourite song,

‘Love is a foolish riot,
And to be loved is a burden.’

Only once did Guido, himself, observe anything that suggested to him the possibility that Amore was not perfectly happy and contented.

About the beginning of April, Signora da Costa wrote to say that she and the Cavaliere thought of coming to Rome for a few weeks, to be near their daughter. The news had an unaccountable effect on Amore. Fabei and Silvano were both present when the letter from Signora da Costa arrived, and they had expected that this, at least, would arouse Amore from her indifference. And so, for a few minutes, it did, though not in the sense they had anticipated.

She seemed to be terribly upset.

‘Oh, do not let them come!’ she kept saying, pacing up and down the studio, and

striking her hands together with a kind of wildness. 'Tell them not to come. It is too late in the season. Spring is here. They must not leave Z-ia in the spring. Guido, do you hear? Oh, tell them not to come!'

Guido looked up from his book, a slow surprise gathering in his eyes.

'Tell them not to come?' he exclaimed. 'I thought their coming would delight you beyond all things. You do not mean it, Amore?'

'Yes; yes. I do—I do not care to have them here just now. I—I——' she sat down and forced herself to be calm. 'Rome never agrees with my mother, and soon it will be hot and stifling, like it was last year. You Romans do not notice it. But she is English—and at Z-ia it is so different, so different. Write to her, Guido. Ask her to come another time. Ask her to wait.'

'To wait? For what?' he asked, still wondering at her strange mood.

She did not answer. She had half turned away from them; but Fabei and Silvano could see the slow tears falling down her cheeks.

Silvano sprang up, his eyes fixed on Guido with sudden uncontrollable passion. Every instant Fabei expected to hear him burst out into mad words that could never be unsaid; and had Guido seen the expression of his fierce young face, a storm would have been inevitable. But he was looking at his wife, perplexed, and a little bit put out by her unreasonable humour.

‘Control yourself, for Heaven’s sake,’ whispered Fabei, touching Silvano’s arm. ‘You had better come away. We are not wanted here; and they will not notice our absence.’

Silvano’s eyes flashed at him. Then, with a shrug of his shoulders, he followed him from the room, down the cool staircase, and out into the sunny street. The boy’s impetuous Southern blood was on fire. He would have liked to challenge Guido to

mortal combat, after the manner of ancient Roman heroes ; or to have stabbed him on his own threshold, like those later Romans who were not quite so heroic,—anything to relieve his anger.

Fabei let him walk off some of his indignation, and did not speak to him until they had reached the top of the broad steps leading to the *Trinita de' Monti*. Here they stopped, and, leaning over the terrace wall, looked down on the artists' models who were lounging in their brilliantly picturesque costumes all over the steps. Just below the rampart a young fellow with long auburn hair, and flushed, sunburnt face, in a bright blue jacket, and with buskined feet, was dancing the mad Saltarello with a peasant woman, with the broad straight back and proud head so often seen amongst the Roman lower classes. On they danced, round and round and round, with flying feet, as though they would dance themselves to purgatory, whilst the unending, monotonous

tune twanged merrily through the air from the gay mandoline.

‘He is breaking her heart,’ Silvano muttered savagely after a little while. ‘Who is to save her?’

‘Not you,’ said Fabei gravely. ‘Take care, *caro mio*. You are within an ace of making a fool of yourself. If you take my advice, you will leave Rome at once.’

‘*Grazia*. I do not care for your advice. What harm can I do here?’

‘There is always harm in making a fool of oneself.’

‘Not if it is only of oneself,’ he answered quickly. ‘Of course I know what you mean. But there is no danger for her. She is wrapped up in her Ice-King.’ He gave a kind of groan, then added, looking Fabei straight in the face, ‘I give you my word of honour that if I thought there was danger for her in my remaining, I would leave Rome this instant. Do you believe me?’

‘*Madonna!* Yes. But there may be a subtle danger you do not understand.’

‘I only wish to be a little help to her, and I think I cheer her up sometimes,’ he said. ‘The first time you think I am forgetting myself, tell me, and I will go. That is a bargain—— I have never breathed of my feelings to her.’

‘I trust you. But women have quick eyes. She may read your secret; and then the innocence of ignorance will be gone from her. She is not so severely cold as she would have us think.’

‘I think she is very cold,’ said Silvano absently, his eyes wandering away over the city roofs, to where the great dome of San Pietro hung like a vast golden shell in the sunlight.

CHAPTER X

‘Beautiful, tender, wasting away for sorrow,
Thus to-day. How will it be with thee to-morrow?
Beautiful, tender. What else?’

A hope tells.’—CHRISTINA ROSSETTI.

SIGNORA DA COSTA and the Cavaliere did not pay their contemplated visit to Rome. The Signora was in bad health, and her husband dreaded the malarious air of the city for her, so that, for the present, Amore was spared from having her feelings probed by the quick sympathy of her mother.

Thus quietly, uneventfully, April passed; and May, with its bright, sunlit days, was hastening, with flower-decked feet, towards burning June; and still, as the long, radiant days came and went, Silvano da Costa

lingered in Rome, though there were life and freedom, as he understood them, waiting for him in his wild mountain home; and whilst he lingered, Fabei lingered too, quietly watching and waiting,—prepared, if he thought fit, to carry him away by force, if nothing else would prevail.

Even Guido, in this golden weather, came down from his lofty abode and his lofty thoughts, to yield himself, in some measure, to the insidious influence of warm, sun-laden breezes, and Nature in fullest blossom. Soon he would be away in Northern Italy—that resting-place for his intellect, where, now and then, during those rare moments when he forgot his self-consciousness, he seemed to come, for a brief space, very close to Nature's heart,—almost to feel its warm pulsations, as in his younger days, before he had aspired to trace the source of all sensation, or endeavoured to discover a philosophic 'Soul of Reason' in those aerial and fleeting spirits that make Nature beautiful to

those who love her for the very mystery that is in her.

Meantime there crept over Amore da Costa the hungering nostalgia that had attacked her last year in the spring. Gradually—to her it seemed with terrible swiftness—her self-control, her impassivity, were deserting her. The fierce hot sunshine stole into her veins, warming her blood into a throbbing desire for more life, more movement, more exuberance of youthfulness. The longing seemed to be burning itself out in her eyes, as they glowed, dreamy and unfathomable, from out the shadows that had fallen so heavily over them of late. And as though-fearful lest they should betray her restlessness to the man who believed that her newly-learnt calm dignity was the natural and unforced result of his teaching, she had acquired a habit of always keeping her white lids lowered when she thought his gaze was upon her.

One of her favourite haunts in those

days was the Church of S. Cecilia in Trastevere.

Often, to those who most rejoice in the beauties of nature, art does not appeal very strongly; it seems cold and lifeless compared with the ever-varying lights and harmonies of earth and sky, the inimitable marvels of form in the swelling curves and clear-cut peaks of mountains, or in the delicate tracteries of tree and leaf and flower. Amore revelled in all these things; but she had never shown a very lively appreciation either of the severe perfection of Hellenic sculpture, or of the glowing colour and physical loveliness of Italian paintings.

But, lately, one figure wrought in marble had haunted her imagination.

It was the famous recumbent statue of Santa Cecilia, said to have been modelled from the embalmed body of the Martyr as it was found in the Catacombs, fallen like one in sleep.

There was something in that beautiful

quiet form — not lying stiff and rigid, but on her side, 'like a virgin in her bed'—that spoke to Amore of the profound calm and dreamlessness of death as the one supreme remedy for all restlessness of heart and brain. So white, so still, so pure, the saint lay there in that quiet shrine under the altar, with such a hush of silence in the languid pose of the averted head, such an infinity of rest in the curves of the wearied limbs.

Oh that she too might find rest and peace,—she, who was no saint wedded to a Heavenly Bridegroom, but a woman with all the passions and frailties of a human soul in love with life!

Sleep, repose, nonentity. They had a peculiar fascination for her at times, strangely at variance with that other craving for a vividly conscious vitality.

'If only one could walk on and on, through those great stretches of poppies, until sleep stole over one for ever,—sleep, deep as death!' she said one day.

They were out on the Campagna, whither Guido often took them, now that the swiftly-maturing spring had power to lure him away from his studio—always the same little party of four, the Della Varazias, Fabei, and Silvano da Costa.

The whole foreground just there was on fire, ablaze with blood-red poppies, — acre after acre of them stretching away in a dazzling mass of waving scarlet. As Amore spoke, Fabei fancied that he could see her wandering dreamily on and on, crushing out the languorous breath of the red flowers with her white feet, poppies in her hair and in her hands, whilst their dream-laden fragrance stole softly over her, weighing down the tired eyelids, soothing the tired senses into a long sleep, deep and still and unconscious.

Silvano, lying at her feet in the flower-sprinkled grass, looked up into her face with eager protest.

‘No,’ he said; ‘we would not go. When one is young one does not want to rest.

Wait until old age comes. Then, perhaps, it will be time to think of sleep. But, now, all one needs is a siesta during the greatest heat of the day.'

'Silvano is right. You must not try to make us think your ideal such a low one, *Amore mia*,' said Guido. 'For what is sleep but an abeyance of all the powers that distinguish us from beasts of the field? It would be more to the purpose if our faculties could for once be thoroughly awakened, instead of being continually weighed down by physical weaknesses. They are what keep us grovelling; and sleep is the most purely physical enjoyment of all. It reduces us, so to speak, into inanimate bodies, absolutely devoid of soul and intellect. And yet,' he added wistfully, 'though we can all of us destroy in ourselves every trace of either of the last, we can never, not even the best of us, rid ourselves of the body, with all its attendant ills and sordid wants.'

'The saints preserve us from such a

metamorphosis!' exclaimed Silvano irreverently. 'Remember, Guido, that even your favourite old philosophers did not get beyond "*Mens sana in corpore sano*." At least they left us our blood and muscles.'

'Yet even they never quite penetrated behind the veil, never wholly cast behind them a certain sensuality if only of thought. It was the fault of their age, not of themselves. And we are even more blind than they.'

'Listen,' said Fabei, 'there is a lark singing just overhead. That is better than any of your philosophies.'

Guido, lying back full length on the soft grass, with his hands behind his head, let his eyes follow the bird as it winged its glad way, up and up and up, farther than eye could reach, into the pure ether, until it became a mere speck upon the translucent blue. And ever, as it soared, its song seemed to pierce stronger and stronger through the still air, growing more radiantly joyous and

free,—such a hymn of praise as was never heard in *San Pietro* even from the papal choir.

‘Tantalising,’ he said, half to himself, ‘that we, with all our striving, cannot rise like that. The lark does seem, literally, to soar in spirit or soul only, divested of all earthly cares and passions.’

Amore, rousing suddenly out of her silent abstraction, let her eyes flash for a moment on her husband.

‘I would rather die without a soul,’ she breathed passionately, ‘than live without a heart.’

Guido looked at her with a little astonishment. She had not been like herself just lately ; he did not understand her.

‘The heart has usurped a great many virtues that do not belong to it,’ he said reprovingly. ‘And its faults are always attributed to any cause but itself. Selfishness, prejudice, blinding enthusiasm, and fifty other follies, come from the heart.’

‘Yes. You are right,’ Amore said gently. Something in her voice seemed to add that he could not be wrong in anything. Yet, a second before, she had spoken with scarcely suppressed rebellion.

‘No. He is wrong, utterly wrong,’ put in Fabei. ‘I have told him so a thousand times, but he will not believe me, fool that he is! But the day will come, Signora.’

She smiled and shook her head.

‘No—not for that. But some day he will discover the true secret of life and teach it to us. Will you not, Guido?’

He did not hear the question. He was far away from them all, following some train of thought that had brought a shade of perplexity to his brow.

Before him spread the mighty Campagna, one vast plain of flowers, and golden grain, and scarlet poppies, and waving green grasses, whilst, beyond, rose its girdle of everlasting hills, blue and soft as violets, against a cloudless sky tremulous with sun-

light. Every inch of that historic ground, every one of those fair undying hills, was theme for a poet's reverie. But Guido's thoughts were not with them.

He was pondering over his own unsatisfying existence, his own failures, his dreary sense that, in spite of his noble aims and strenuously conscientious life, he yet misunderstood the vital essence of beauty even more than did his fellows.

A voice, faint, uncomprehended, and hitherto silent, seemed to be speaking to him of a new faith,—something so remote from his former beliefs that, though conscious of its gradual birth in his mind, he failed to grasp its nature, and half mistrusted it as a deceptive and alien light.

Fabei, too, was in a profound reverie. He was wondering how much longer he could reconcile his conscience to Silvano's prolonged sojourn in Rome. He trusted him implicitly. But there was an eloquence in his eyes, in his voice, in his manner to

Amore, that betrayed what he was too honourable to tell in words.

Little scraps of conversation came to Fabei, now and then, from where the two were sitting together at a short distance from himself and Guido.

‘Do you see that white gull?’ he heard Amore saying. ‘Look how the sun gleams on its breast, until it shines like a star against the blue, or like a pearl and silver vessel of the gods.’

‘As love comes flashing into our lives,’ murmured Silvano. ‘Is not that it?’

‘I think it must be so,’ she said absently.

‘You think so? Don’t you know it?’

She sighed, and passed her hand over her forehead. Then, with a smile, answered lightly, ‘Ah, well! Yes. I know it. We all know it, do we not?’

‘We will ask Guido. He will tell us. Only, I suppose he will call it the Ideal, instead of love.’

‘No, no. Do not disturb him,’ she said

hastily. 'He is in another world, learning what will make him famous,' and as she spoke she laid her hand on Silvano's arm to arrest him.

The blood rushed into his face. For a moment he looked down on the long nervous fingers, vaguely noticing how thin and delicate they had become. And then he lifted his eyes, full of passionate longing, and saw that she too was flushed with a strange, new shyness.

The truth came upon her with a curious kind of blissful fear, a triumphant exultation,—not because of Silvano, but because Guido was looking at her with sudden interest and wonder, as in the old days at Z-ia.

'A thousand apoplexies on the boy!' ejaculated Fabei under his breath. 'I shall carry him away from Rome to-morrow. What in the name of the devil does he mean by looking at her like that?'

Guido sighed impatiently. It was dis-

heartening, after years of mortification of the senses, to be overcome by such a confusion of ideas, such an unreasonable quickening of the pulses, as though the sudden dissatisfaction he had been feeling with his hitherto cherished ideals, had come to him with something of relief, — a reaction of the passions after long-sustained asceticism of thought and emotion.

‘Don’t you think Amore is much changed?’ he asked irrelevantly, lowering his voice that only Fabei might hear his words. ‘She has not been looking strong for some time; and her beauty has gone. But, once or twice, during the last few days, it has struck me that she is regaining it in some degree. For instance, when I chanced to look up at her just now, there was the old expression as vivid and beautiful as ever. It is curious,’ he added meditatively, ‘that she never looks like that at me. Silvano, alone, seems to have power to draw forth sudden gleams of it. Yet what does *he* know

or feel of anything that comes from our deepest and finest consciousness?’

‘Because he cannot sympathise with such a transcendental consciousness as yours, it does not follow that other people find him equally unsympathetic,’ said Fabei, rather impatiently. ‘You are cold and rigid in your ideal, Guido. But remember that he is young—they are both young. For them life without warm human affection is not life. Forgive me, *amico mio*. It is time your eyes were opened. I must speak my mind, even if it costs me your friendship.’

‘What do you mean? You don’t think that I neglect her?’ exclaimed Guido, surprised and distressed. ‘If so, abuse me to your heart’s content; it is no more than I deserve. But *how*——I thought I made her happy. What have I left undone?’

‘It is not neglect. It is one of those intangible things that can only be known by instinct. You live too high, my philosopher.

I always told you so. Any one can understand the object of Pygmalion, who wished to animate a beautiful stone figure into real, breathing life. But I defy any one to find rhyme or reason in your incomprehensible desire to freeze a warm-hearted human being into a block of cold and insensate marble. It is sheer madness.'

'I only wished to elevate her. If I tried to rob her of life—as you understand it—it was only that I might lead her from a lower to a higher state. But in that too I have failed,—failed miserably!' he cried. 'My life has been one egregious mistake from beginning to end.'

'It need not have been so. It was your own doing. What does your beloved Plato say? That none should aspire to poetry or the arts who is not filled with the madness of the Muses. You are too sane, Guido. Your constant endeavour has been to put out every spark of that divine insanity which possessed you by nature, and which might have led you

close to your ideal. You have courted your fate.'

Guido said nothing for some minutes. But when he spoke, his words hit the mark with a trenchant candour that rather disconcerted Fabei, who had not meant to betray his private thought so plainly.

'You mean,' said Guido, after looking with troubled wonder at his wife and Silvano, 'that though I have frozen her, another man might thaw her?'

'It is possible,' Fabei answered coolly. 'Possible. But she has loved you too well to make it probable.'

'And if it were so,—suppose, for instance, that they two were husband and wife, both young and enthusiastic. What good would their love bring them?' went on Guido. 'None. They would only find that earthly love *cannot* last in the perfection they imagine. It would die from very sweetness; and then, what would remain to them but regret and craving for a vanished happiness?'

Even I know enough about it to realise that.'

'Yes, it is true. Painfully true. That has always been an argument of yours that no one can refute. Love fades; the loved one passes away from us. Yet neither you nor any one else need hope to teach mankind to do without it.'

'Folly, weakness,' murmured Guido. 'Folly, worse than any other because ineradicable. But it is no use talking about it!' he exclaimed, springing up. 'Why should I go back to a subject I worked out years ago? The beauty of the spring is intoxicating us. Let's go home. Amore, you will get a sunstroke if we stay out in the heat of the day. Are you ready to come home?'

Fabei never forgot that walk, the last they four ever took together. Guido was in one of his silent moods and scarcely spoke all the way home, walking like a man in a dream, his hands behind his

back, his eyes bent on the ground. He did not even seem to notice that Fabei and Silvano parted from them when they reached the *Piazza Navona*, except that, a few minutes later, he asked Amore if she felt tired, and drew her hand through his arm with the quiet courtesy he never failed to show her.

When they reached the Palazzo, and had climbed the long flight of stairs leading to the studio he flung himself on a chair, and, with head sunk on his chest, gave himself up to deep and brooding thought.

Amore had long ago realised that, at such times, she was unnecessary to him, and that he had no wish to communicate his thoughts to her limited comprehension.

Yet, for an instant, she stood looking down at him, as though expecting him to address her.

Feeling her eyes upon him he looked up. 'You are very tired,' he said. 'We

have let you over-walk yourself. You are pale as a ghost, *carina*. Had you not better go and rest?’

‘Yes. I am going,’ she said, moving towards the next room.

She hesitated again before letting the curtain fall behind her, looking at Guido with a curious expectant hope in her eyes as though waiting for a reprieve of some sort.

But he was already lost in meditation, probably far away in some region whither she could not have followed him, or where, had she done so, she would have been gradually chilled to death.

She dropped the curtain and passed into her room, where the flowers, the numerous little luxuries she had gathered round her, the gleaming white Mercury in the corner, all seemed in such vivid contrast to her languid and dejected figure.

It would be hard to say of what Guido

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was thinking all that long afternoon. He scarcely understood the drift of his own thoughts. Not that they were new ones; far from it. But the light in which he viewed them was new,—exhausting, perplexing, dazzling to his purblind eyes. It was the old story of wasted talents, of energies flung after chimerical dreams. . . .

‘And I gave my heart to know wisdom; and to know madness and folly: I perceived that this also is vexation of spirit. For in much wisdom is much grief; and he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow.’

He must have sat there absorbed in thought for nearly two hours.

Then he was roused by Amore passing through the studio in her hat and cloak.

‘Are you going out again?’ he asked. ‘That is hardly wise after our long walk from the Campagna. You confessed that you were tired.’

‘I told Silvano I would walk with him in the Borghese Gardens,’ she answered.

‘I have not been there more than once this spring, and it will be cool and pleasant at this hour.’

‘Silvano? It is always Silvano!’ exclaimed Guido impatiently. ‘Surely you have seen enough of him already to-day. You had much better stay quietly at home, and tell him to come for you another day.’

She was no longer pale. Such a vivid red had rushed into her cheeks, such radiance illumined her eyes, that her youth and beauty seemed suddenly to have returned, intensified by a knowledge of the pain and experience of life. Her lips broke into a smile of such strange pity and exultation that Guido felt as if she were passing out of his reach,—possessed of some secret which he, for all his wisdom, was unable to fathom.

‘*Aimer, c’est virtuellement savoir.*’ The question that had baffled Guido all the afternoon was clear as daylight to Amore.

Was the moment for which she had

hungered all these months coming to her at last? Was her Ice-King melting under the sunshine of her love, hidden and repressed though it had been by gray and melancholy clouds of a cold philosophy?

CHAPTER XI

‘Whose heart was breaking for a little love!’

AMORE hurried to keep her appointment in a fever of impatience.

Her pulses were throbbing with elation ; all the long-constrained passion within her seemed to have broken its bonds, and to be surging gradually over her, hot and unresisted. She—so cold and stiff and grave—was determined, for this one day if no other, to surrender herself to the warmth and weakness and folly that make up the delight of other women’s lives ; once, just once, to prove to herself whether she, too, possessed power in her eyes and in her smile to stir other hearts into longing and admiration. How could she help knowing that such

power *ought* to be hers, by right of her beauty, her keen and healthy craving to be in touch with her fellow-creatures.

‘I am young. Why should I not be free and happy like others,’ she was saying to herself, as she hastened across the *Piazza del Popolo*, thronged with loiterers. ‘How gay and careless they all are. They have their friends, their jokes and laughter, and mutual understandings. And to-day I am one of them. No one is happier than I. How splendid it is to be young.’

Her sympathy evidently showed itself in her face, for people turned to look at her, and several women nodded a cheery ‘*Felice sera*’ as she passed. She longed to stop and talk with them, to kiss the funny little monkey-faced babies in their arms, to listen to the gossip they were pouring out to one another.

It was quieter when she turned into the Borghese Gardens, under shadow of the trees. No one was there except a lanky

English girl and her sheepish *fiancé*, who were giggling at each other's shy and jerky overtures. Even they did not seem ridiculous. They were ugly and commonplace ; but they felt every bit as good a right as any one to take their matter-of-fact little love-making into the seclusion of the Borghese Gardens. And as the beautiful woman passed them with hurrying steps and expectant eyes, probably they pitied her for being alone, and said to themselves that *she* could never have passed through such an interesting and romantic phase as they were passing through now.

Yet she was happy enough in her way.

'To-night I will tell him,' she kept saying to herself, over and over again. 'To-night I will tell him ; to-night I will explain to him, and make him understand.'

Silvano, waiting impatient and gloomy at a little distance from the great gateway, saw her coming, and at sight of the radiant change in her face felt his heart leap with

an unspoken thought that he was too loyal to let himself recognise.

‘I began to think you had forgotten,’ he said, joining her. ‘I have been waiting an age.’

Amore laughed, and held up her hand.

‘Listen! I said at six o’clock, and there goes the chime.’

‘Well! I don’t mind. I was impatient, and you ought to take it as a compliment.’

‘How lovely it is here,’ she said, throwing back her head and breathing in the warm fragrance of the air. ‘Where shall we go?’

‘Anywhere out of the beaten tracks,’ and Silvano flung an irritated glance at the poor English couple, who, as it happened, were not paying the least attention to him. ‘I hate being pried upon by these wretched tourists. They seem to think that we can’t sleep, eat, walk, or talk like ordinary people, but were put here for them to stare at.’

‘I don’t believe they trouble their heads about us. Why should they?’

‘What a hurry you are in! What has come to you, Amore? You, the most indolent of people. To-day you have got wings to your feet.’

‘Ah! I used not to be so lazy — not at Z-ia. Do you remember the walks we had, and the day we were caught in the storm?’

‘Remember?’

He began to wish he had never asked her to meet him. The test was harder than he had expected. Every minute he was growing more enraged with the fate that stood between them. He could only take refuge in a half-sullen bitterness; he felt that a word, a look, the smallest sign of weakness or sadness in her, would madden him beyond endurance.

He had come there prepared to steel himself against her melancholy, but not against the strange, almost delirious excitement in which he found her. As she led him on along one lovely glade after another, laughing, singing, chattering, with the wildest,

most irrepressible merriment, he felt like one in a dream who chases some mocking and intoxicating vision. What had come to her? What sudden joy had transfigured her in the short space of one afternoon? He dared not face the question? The more she laughed and talked, the more cross and silent he became, until at last she turned to him with a delicious little gesture of impatience.

‘Silvano, Silvano, how dull and dreary you are! What is the matter with you?’

‘*Madonna!* It is you who are different,’ he said, with a quick feeling of injury. ‘I—I don’t see what there is to be so merry about.’

Amore laughed and shrugged her shoulders.

‘Ah! Don’t be cross. To-day I want to be young and happy. I am not old yet—not so very old. Why should I always behave as if I were fifty? I want to be young, — don’t you understand, Silvano?’

Really young. Won't you help me, just to-day, for this once ?'

'Help you? How can *I* help you?' he muttered, turning his eyes away from her beauty. 'We ought to be going home, Guido will think——'

'Oh, why do you try to cut short my enjoyment?' she cried petulantly. 'I want to feel as I used to feel. Cannot you understand? Do you think I have forgotten, Silvano? Come! I will race you to that fountain. I wonder if I can run as fast as I could at Z-ia, when I was a girl?'

She darted away from him and ran lightly down the green slope, until she arrived breathless beside the little moss-grown stone fountain, every pulse thrilling with life and joy.

Silvano followed more soberly, a thundercloud on his dark, boyish face. He was beginning to think her very heartless with her high spirits, when she *must* know

that he was miserable about her. It was hard—just when he had nerved himself to be strong-minded—to have to resist her in this fantastic humour of self-abandonment. There was a recklessness in it that puzzled and frightened him. But this very feverishness was infectious, stirring his senses into a dangerous reciprocity of emotion that was fast hurling down his self-control.

‘How cross you look,’ said Amore, dipping her hand into the fountain, and showering a little spray of glittering drops into his face as he joined her. ‘Why do you frown so? Do you, like every one else, think it wrong for me ever to be like other women—and wish me always, always to be stiff and cold as a stone statue?’

‘I don’t understand you,’ he stammered. ‘Why are you like this—to-day of all days?’

‘Why to-day? Ah, because it is to-day!’ she interrupted. She was looking

at him with one of those radiant smiles, her face full of some sad, yet rapturous, memory and hope.

He was thinking of their morning on the Campagna, when, for the first time, she had seemed to read his secret. And he could not, for the life of him, drive away the terrible hope that perhaps it was the memory of that swift and expressive look that made her so sweet and friendly with him now.

His gaze startled her, and once more she continued her hurried, restless walk.

The sun was dying over the city; a reflection of the flaming sky reddened the lawns and alleys, filtering gem-like through the trees. A gleaming network of cobwebs stretched from stem to stem, gold and filmy, a mystic fairyland that at a breath would vanish.

‘Amore — I want to say something,’ said Silvano suddenly, his voice curt and indistinct. ‘I want your advice. I want—

that is, I think—I think I ought to get married,' he ended abruptly.

Amore stood still, and lifted her brows in surprise. '*Married?*' she exclaimed; 'I thought—— Is it the little Espina girl? She is good, and she will make you happy. Have you spoken to her yet?'

'No. I wanted your advice. You are married; you know what the gain and the loss are? Is it worth the risk?'

He stood before her with downcast eyes, young, passionate, unhappy—trembling with longing to look up and meet the tender pity of her gaze, — furious with himself for his weakness.

'On one condition the gain is worth the loss,' she answered gently. 'Without it—no.'

'And I?' he murmured. 'Can I make that condition? Does it rest with me?'

His misery, his emotion, were beginning to stir her. She was trembling

from head to foot, her eyes shining with mingled regret and delight and longing. What had she not missed? How beautiful it would have been to be loved by this young fellow with his unselfish devotion, to have such a wealth of adoration poured out day and night at her feet! If only——

‘What can I do?’ he repeated.

‘*Love* her,’ she whispered, with a kind of gasp, as though the words had been choking her; and, looking up, now, he saw all her heart’s yearning flushing into her soft cheeks, and burning in her passionate eyes.

He gave a little cry, and the next moment was on his knees kissing her feet, the hem of her gown, her hands, until his arms had stolen round her waist, and, mad with joy, his lips were close to her beautiful face.

But she wrenched herself away, thrust-

ing him from her with all the strength of her arms, and warding him back with outstretched supplicating hands. 'O God! O God!' she cried, bursting into wild tears. 'What have I done? Do not touch me; do not come near me. Don't you see? Don't you understand? What I love is love; not *you*, but love and Guido—love and Guido. You came too late. Take me back to him—take me back to Guido. It is Guido's love I want. My heart is breaking for want of it.'

.

From every church and basilica in Rome a musical clang of bells had rung the Ave Maria. The golden sunlight had been gathered tenderly into a luminous sky, and the bright, soft day had faded into the loveliest of twilights before Amore della Varazia came home.

About the hour of sunset Guido strolled to the *Pincio*, not with the avowed intention of looking for his wife, but with a vague

uneasiness on her behalf, which it would not have entered his head to attribute to any cause but solicitude for her well-being.

He leant over the high parapet of the *Muro-Torto*, whence he could see one of the gates of the Villa Borghese, until, at last, tired of watching for two figures that did not come, he hurried to the steps leading down into the *Piazza del Popolo*, thinking that they would probably come back from that side. Finally, in a fever of impatience rare with him, he went home, and tried to interest himself in a new metaphysical book. Shortly afterwards the door of the studio opened gently, and Amore entered, with the lagging footsteps of one wearied out beyond concealment.

‘You are very late, observed Guido, glancing up, and still feeling unreasonably irritable. ‘You know you are not strong; and if you wish to make yourself ill, this is the way to do it. Where have you been?’

R

Not in the Borghese Gardens at this hour, I hope?’

‘My comings and goings do not generally interest you so much,’ she answered, leaning wearily against the frescoed wall. ‘Yes. I have been in the Borghese Gardens. It is a beautiful evening.’

‘If Silvano has no more common sense than this I cannot trust you with him again,’ said Guido icily. ‘You know how pestilential the evening air becomes in the gardens at this season. I did not think Silvano could be so stupid.’

‘It was my fault,’ said Amore in a low voice. ‘We missed our way, and I was too tired to walk home without resting.’

‘But apart from that,’ he went on hurriedly, ‘I am not sure that it is right for you to go about together so constantly. In fact, I cannot allow it. If you care so little what people may say about you, I must care for you. In future, I must ask you to see less of Silvano. It is not much to ask, and I

have put up with his constant presence long enough. It is insupportable.'

It had burst out at last,—that smouldering, uncomprehended jealousy which had been racking him all day. This was the first time he had ever spoken impatiently to his wife. And now, his sudden display of one of the pettiest of human passions seemed to shatter the barrier between them.

Against his gentle coldness she had been able to make no resistance. But against his anger she could give back warmth for warmth, passion for passion, wounded love for the jealousy that is only a hidden form of love.

She raised her head at his last speech. Her eyes were burning; two feverish red spots flushed on her otherwise colourless face; her words burst from her in broken sentences, all the pent-up anguish of her heart pouring out in passionate accents before him.

'What are you saying? What do you mean? May nothing young and beautiful

come into my life?' she cried, flinging out her hands with wild supplication. 'For days and weeks and months I have tried to make myself like you—for your sake. But I cannot. You freeze me. You offer me death instead of life, and I am not strong enough to endure it. Your world is so high, so cold, so still. It is not earth; it is a heaven we cannot reach. Will nothing lower satisfy you? Will you not come down to us and try our life?'

Guido sprang up, startled out of his calm. He would have caught the trembling hands in his, but she snatched them away from him.

'Let me go on—this once let me speak,' she went on breathlessly. 'I cannot keep silent any longer. I wanted to love you—that is all. But you would not have it. What you wanted was knowledge, and that I could not give. I have prayed and struggled to be what you would have me be. But it kills me to be so cold and stiff. Let me help you—let me love you. I will be the handmaid of

your art—I will give up my life to your service. Only, for God's sake, give me a little of your heart. I cannot live up to the dead and passionless perfection that you love.'

She sank upon a couch, seized with sudden trembling, her very lips shivering as with the bitter cold of winter.

Guido held her in his arms, terrified by her deadly pallor.

'You are ill!' he cried. 'You have caught the fever!'

'Yes. I have a fever,' she said, with a wild little laugh. Then, holding up to the light her small hand and wrist, on which the veins showed in delicate blue tracery through the transparency of her white skin, 'Do you not see that I am dying?' she added with a sob.

She clung to him, her head falling back, her eyes melting into his from under the half-closed lids, and little sobs breaking through her parted lips. Guido held her tightly, his heart throbbing with a strange joy.

‘No, no. It is the beginning of life, of love!’ he cried tenderly. ‘It has been a mistake, a grievous mistake. But we will forget it. We will live anew. I will cherish you with my whole heart. Listen, my little one—I am telling you that I want you more than all the knowledge in the world. Kiss me—forgive me—teach me the beautiful secret of your love.’

But it was too late. She had fallen back in his arms, senseless, deaf to the words she had been craving so passionately to hear, unconscious of the kisses that were lavished on her lips and brow.

CHAPTER XII

'Look in my face ; my name is " Might-have-been ;"
I am also called " No-More, Too-late, Farewell." '

ROSSETTI.

ALL that night Amore lay tossing and raving with delirium, now in a burning fever, now shivering with the terrible ague that is part of the deadly pestilence that so often strikes down the youngest and fairest in that golden Italian sunshine.

From the first there was no hope. It was one of those virulent cases in which the fever, seizing on a weak and wasted form, flames itself out with relentless speed, as though Death had scarcely patience to await the slow course of gradually failing breath.

She was dying. It was a question, not of days, but of hours ; and then, for her, the

great mystery of life and love would be solved; she would be in the calm and dreamless sleep that, only a day before, had seemed to her so unattainable, so sweet a thing to be desired.

Guido would not leave her bedside. Through the long watches of that melancholy night, thoughts, full of strange and bitter sweetness, came to him like a revelation of sunlight to the dying eyes of one blind from his youth upwards,—a sudden vision of gold in the sky, of light breaking upon the misty hills, of life throbbing through the world's spaces;—seen when it is too late to do more than stretch out the eager arms, in vain, before the Eternal darkness comes to shut out the beautiful life of the world for ever.

With Guido there was something sadder, more poignant than mere yearning after a fleeting loveliness; there was the bitterness of remorse, the fierce regret for blind and consummate folly. His ideal had come to him,

had lingered by his side, had walked with her soft hand in his, that was cold enough to freeze the life out of hers ; his very embrace bore in it the chill of death.

Thus, what he had been seeking throughout his life had come to him, unheeded, until the flash of its vanishing wings startled him into the knowledge that it had not only *come* to him, but had passed for ever out of his sight and reach. Sad, unutterably sad, that he, a lover and seeker after the Beautiful, should have found it, only to break it in the rough carelessness of his grasp—to weep over the shattered fragments that no human skill could shape anew.

She died at early dawn, when the sunrise was flushing over the hills, and all things were waking to the fresh life of the spring. To her, what mattered it now whether the sun shone, or the wind blew with a gray mist of rain? Life and Love were passing into Immortality.

It was over very quickly at the last,—a smile, a sigh, a kiss so long and sweet that it seemed as if Death itself could not sever the lips of the dying from the passionate ones of the living; a little sobbing cry to Guido to hold her tight in his arms, and comfort her through the terror that was coming; then the silence of Rest on her lips, the mystic fluttering of New Life on her brow.

For Amore della Varazia the Gate Beautiful had opened.

The 'Dante and Beatrice' was the last picture Della Varazia painted for the eyes of the world. He was forgotten, superseded by a younger genius, passed over by the capricious glance of Fame.

'He was the comet of a season,' said his friends. 'He outlived his own genius. It is only a Raphael, a Michael Angelo who can keep the flame bright through the shadows of a life's experience.'

His masterpiece, the beautiful picture of

his dead wife, was unknown. Only Fabei and a few of his chosen friends were allowed to see this ultimate triumph of his genius ; and to them, acquainted as they were with his character and his strained mental experience, this picture, with its brief legend ‘ Beato Amore,’ seemed to be the final answer to those vexed questions that had so long baffled him.

‘ . . . *Aimer c'est virtuellement savoir ;
savoir n'est pas virtuellement aimer.*’

THE END

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